

DRONES' HONEY

BY

SOPHIE MAY

"When a young man has tasted drones' honey, . . . then he
returns into the country of the lotus-eaters."

PLATO'S *Republic*.

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TO MY FRIEND
MISS EMILY DANFORTH
This Book
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

23X 61

DRONES' HONEY.

I.

"He that is wise, let him pursue some desire or other ; for he that doth not affect some one thing in chief, unto him all things are distasteful and tedious."

"**B**ENJAMIN, my son, do you see that Kate has a skein ready for you to hold?"

It was precisely what the young man had been trying not to see ; but at this maternal reminder he sprang forward with tardy gallantry, and proffered his services, which Miss Kate laughingly accepted. And thus he was pinned for an indefinite period in the recesses of the bay-window, with arms extended like pegs from the wall. He looked at the worsted, and occasionally essayed a remark ; while she looked at him and replied, till in some way — she said he was careless — the skein became entangled, and her white fingers flew hither and thither among the meshes, trying to find the lost clew.

Out of doors sullen drops of rain were splashing steadily from a blue-gray sky into the slate-gray pools of the street ; and Mr. Benjamin Kirke found himself

listening rather dreamily to the monotonous sound, and wondering why Miss Kate Stanley had not lunched at home on such a day as this, instead of walking a half-mile in the rain to discuss worsted-patterns with his sister Lucy. She came very often, and there was no reasonable doubt that it was always to see Lucy. But Ben, the only son of the family, regarded her call to-day as a "visitorial penance." He had asked his young friend Joseph Fiske to luncheon, intending to show him some new bric-à-brac; and here was Joe, the most restless of mortals, dancing about like a piece of quicksilver, impatient to be gone. Was there no end to the yarn?

"Benjamin, my son," said the little mother again, turning her head, with its cap of filmiest lace, toward the bay-window, "what are your objections to the Land of the Sky?"

"None, mother; none whatever," he replied, looking across the angry waves of worsted with a ready smile. "Only the world is wide, and one doesn't care to go to the same place every season."

"I quite agree with you there," said Miss Stanley, raising both her involved hands gracefully, though rather to the detriment of the yarn. "The world is just full of pleasant resorts, and one doesn't care to go to the same resort every summer."

As this sounded extremely like what he had just been saying, the young man paused a moment, trying to discover wherein the difference consisted. Miss Stanley had a way of taking up one's remarks and differentiating them, showing that the ideas pleased her, and she wished to make them fully her own.

But this bewildered rather than flattered Mr. Kirke. Her eyes, too, fatigued him. They were considered expressive, and she used them a great deal; but he had never been able to feel their charm as he ought.

"She is a good girl, and a pretty girl, and expects to be admired, and it's on my conscience to admire her. What possesses me that I can't do it?" queried he, being of a metaphysical turn.

And then he sank back with an air of polite endurance, sitting in a stooping posture, as if to reduce in some degree his huge proportions; for he was an overgrown young man, who blushed at standing "six feet two" in his boots.

"But you do enjoy the mountains?" she asked, breaking the pause.

"Oh, yes; but the sea is more to my fancy just now!"

"That's exactly what I always say," she returned enthusiastically. "I adore mountains, but I prefer the sea. And there's Newport, now. James and Molly declare it's perfectly enchanting. That was what your mother and I were discussing when you and Mr. Fiske came in."

"Yes, my son, it is really worth considering — for you and the girls. Not for me, of course, for I shall not leave your father," returned Mrs. Kirke with a doubtful glance at the young man's impenetrable face.

"And I told your mother," went on Miss Stanley, "that brother James and sister Molly have such a fancy for Newport that they've quite won me over; that is," with an eloquent uplifting of the speaking eyes, "that is, if everybody else likes it, and we can arrange

a pleasant little party of our own. James and Molly would not want any one outside the two families, — they're so particular, don't you know? "

Mr. Kirke smiled quietly, as a young man may who does not mean to be appropriated without his own consent. He had never even thought of Newport, much less of combining the two families in a Kirke-Stanley party. If his mother and sisters had made the plan, they would find they had reckoned without the son and brother.

"How quiet you are, Ben!" said Lucy, his younger sister, coming up to pinch his ear.

"I'm waiting till all the evidence is in. You wouldn't have me interrupt a witness?" he replied, with a glance at Miss Stanley, who considered his glances "magnetic."

"He wants you to go on, Kate. You are the witness for Newport."

"And what if I should not choose to go on?" said Miss Kate archly. "What then? If I were you, Lucy, I wouldn't indulge him in these high airs. It's not the way I used to manage James."

"But Ben is not in the least like James. He has to have every thing expounded and compounded before he will choose to understand. — Please look up here, sir. Do you know that Mr. and Mrs. James Stanley propose to go to Newport in July, and have honored us by an invitation to join them?"

"Indeed! Flattered and obliged, I'm sure," said the tiresome brother with a profound bow.

And Miss Stanley went on with animation to repeat,—

"James and Molly are so particular, you know. There are so few people James and Molly would really choose to take into the party."

"My compliments to James and Molly, if you please, Kate," — here the last lingering inch of worsted was wound off, — "my compliments," said Mr. Kirke, springing up, and flourishing his liberated arms; "and tell them I feel it an unmerited honor, but will take it into consideration."

Then, without pausing to note her discomfiture, he darted across the room, caught up his little mother, and bore her through the air in his arms to an easy-chair near the grate.

"Benjamin, my son, have you *no* sense of propriety?" gasped the gentle lady with a plaintive attempt at dignity. "Benjamin, my son, do you know this is very rude — before our guests?"

And then, finding the giant quite insensible to public opinion, she resigned herself perforce, and permitted him to play with her jewelled fingers; while she looked around with a deprecatory air, which said, —

"You see I've made all proper resistance; but, really, he's a boy you can do nothing with."

"Oh, why do you mind it, mamma dear?" said Lucy. "Everybody knows you and Ben are such lovers."

The fair matron blushed like a girl, and her husband raised his judicial eyes from his newspaper to see what they were all laughing at. Whether the wily young man had intended it or not, there was a summary end to the Newport argument, and he seized the opportunity to ask Mr. Fiske up-stairs.

"I always said you were the luckiest fellow alive,

Ben," remarked Mr. Fiske with a smothered sigh, after he had sufficiently admired the newly imported Italian statue of Cupid and Psyche, of the color of well-creamed coffee, and both the young men had seated themselves in the elegant den, for a chat.

Mr. Kirke answered with the easy indifference of one sated with luxury, —

"Well, yes, I've no fault to find with this suite of rooms, unless it's overcrowded with bric-à-brac. It's surprising how such trash accumulates."

Mr. Fiske rose restlessly.

"Where did you shoot this wild-cat? In Canada? Where did you get this lace coral?" taking down a fine specimen, with light purple veins and darker arteries. And, scarcely waiting for answers, he turned from the cabinet to the framed photograph of a regatta race. "How many cups have you won? Oh, there they are in a row, — two, four, six! Well, why not? That comes of your 'giantism,' " drawing up his own slight, wiry figure, and looking at his friend, laughing. If the laugh was rather forced, one could scarcely wonder. He had found the world a battle-field; and Ben Kirke, fully three years older, had found it a playground. Ben had had avant-couriers to cut down all the thorns and briars in his path of roses; while on foot and alone, and against fearful odds, young Joe had walked up and stormed the enemies' citadels.

And Joe was only a boy yet, a boy of delicate mould. Surely Fate was either perverse or blindfold, or the positions of these two young men would be exactly reversed.

"Yes, Art always said 'Kirke's luck' was the by-word at school and college."

Arthur Fiske, or "Art," Joe's elder brother, deceased, had been Ben's chosen friend; for whose sake it was that Ben could now be patient with Joe's many vagaries, and consent to admit the boy to a sort of intermittent confidence; rather strained sometimes, it must be confessed, as the two young men were widely unlike, and had very few points in common.

"Did Art say that?"

Joe was not quite sure that he ever did, but the answer was prompt enough.

"Yes: he said the fellows envied you beyond everything. Lots of money, and no hardships, you know. And here you are, sir, at twenty-five, a flourishing lawyer, with a senior partner to do all the work, and let you roam to the ends of the earth."

"Quarter, quarter! Grant that Randall does the hard work, grant that he lets me lounge in the office occasionally; but that's not saying I relish the law for a vocation. To draw it mildly, Fiske, I hate it."

His companion looked up in genuine surprise.

"Then what upon earth sent you into it? I thought if ever a body did as he chose, it was you, Ben Kirke."

Mr. Kirke smiled, elongated himself, and brushed an imaginary dust-speck from his sleeve.

"So that's as much as you know about it, Fiske. Father planned it all while I was in the cradle, and the first word my infant tongue was permitted to lisp was Blackstone."

"Indeed! So you sacrificed yourself to the judge? Well, I knew you were the pattern of meekness."

"Thank you. I was called a lovely child; but the chances are I might have held out against the law, if I'd known as much about it then as I do now."

"Ah? And didn't you know nearly as much? An intelligent infant" —

"Come now, be civil, Joe. I had an especial, growing horror for litigation, and that settled it; for father's an old-style Puritan, and holds to taking life across the grain."

"Oh! is that it?"

"And if I'd been of a sensitive nature, and fainted at the sight of blood, he'd have made a surgeon of me, Joe, as true as you're alive."

Mr. Fiske spun about like a revolving globe, alighting at last on one foot. He was receiving information, and it rather excited him.

"If I'd been sharp enough to faint," went on Mr. Kirke reflectively, "I suppose I might have been sawing bones this minute; and it's dawning upon me that I should have enjoyed it."

Mr. Fiske revolved again.

"Why, yes, you always had a knack that way. I remember how you patched up those fellows in the base-ball club; Jones, wasn't it, and Stanley?"

"No; Jones and Meader. One was a finger, the other an arm. And then there was Holway, with a break above the ankle. I make no pretensions to general scholarship; but if there's one thing I'm tolerably versed in, it's anatomy."

Here he arose and stood erect, with a look of conscious power. It was surprising how well the expression and attitude became him.

"I tell you, Fiske, I have times of thinking I'll stop this drifting, and go to steering."

"What port?"

"Ay, there you have me. Surgery is drudgery, and medicine a farce. And, besides, my fate was decided for me a dozen years ago: so where's the use?" returned the young man, settling back indolently into his chair.

"A dozen years ago? How is that?"

"Sit down again, Joe, and I'll tell you. It's not a long story."

Mr. Fiske steadied himself on the arm of a divan, and swung one foot pendulum-wise, while his friend began slowly, —

"You know father is a bright and shining light in the church, though a very blue light. Well, I always went to church and Sunday school regularly; and one Sunday, twelve years ago, — I was over thirteen at the time — I strayed down to the wharf with another boy, — I'll tell you who it was: it was Dan Thatcher. And we stood watching the ships come in. We were both of us going to Sunday school, but thought there was no hurry, — you know how time slips with boys, — when all of a sudden I heard my name called, and father seized upon me and caught me up like a whirlwind. Not a word spoken, no chance for apologies or explanations: I was just marched by the jacket-collar through the street, into the church, and down the aisle to my class, where the boys were reciting. I lived it through: but my blood was up, and when I got home I walked into father's study; and said I, —

"Father, you got me into Sunday school to-day,

but it's the last time. I'll never go again as long as I live.' "

"And you didn't?"

"And I didn't; though I fairly adored my teacher, Mrs. Lathrop. Of course I didn't, Joe. Father was wrong, morally wrong," returned Ben, with a smouldering fire in his hazel eyes, which suggested that he might not have been, early in life, an easy boy to manage.

"But the gist of the story is, that mother never got over that rebellion, as she calls it, though I've been a rigid church-goer ever since; and a year ago, when father made this law-cage for me, she said, 'Benjamin, my son, do not thwart your father; another rebellion would kill me.' So I bowed my head, and entered the cage; and there you have it, Fiske, in a nutshell. What are you going to do with these women when they lie awake o' nights, and cry? You can't be a brute."

The smouldering fire in his eyes had given place now to the look of tenderness which usually came into them whenever he spoke to or of his mother, or even thought of her.

Mr. Fiske dropped lightly upon his feet, and nodded in a wise way, indicating vast experience with maternal tears. He did not hold them very sacred, it was plain to see.

"But I've never considered the law a finality, Joe, and shall be ready to slip out of it at any time, if something better should offer. — Ah, is that you, Caligula?"

The door opened warily at this invitation; and a

handsome, elaborately-dressed mulatto boy, some four or five years old, peeped in, flourishing a silver tray, but shrank back with a frightened roll of the eyes, on seeing a stranger.

"What little monkey is this?" laughed Mr. Fiske.

"Our cook's grandson; and I've begged him for a parlor decoration. Named him Caligula on account of his new shoes. — Dance, Caligula."

Whereupon the urchin struck into an irresistibly droll double-shuffle, fixing his rolling eyes intently on the beloved slippers, and beating time with the tray.

"Hold, that will do, my young emperor. Where did you get that tray?"

"Off 'm the table, sir-r. You telled me to fetch it, and I 'membered and fetched it," running triumphantly to his master, and offering it with a deep bow and flourish.

"But where are the letters? Why didn't you put the letters on it?" exclaimed Mr. Kirke, breaking into immoderate laughter. Then, as the child's eyes threatened to overflow, "Oh, well, never mind! The letter without the spirit killeth; and you've shown a noble *spirit*, my boy."

The pleasant tone and smile effectually stayed the infant's tears; but he remained hopelessly bewildered till his master added, "Take the tray down to the parlor, to the pretty lady in the lace cap, and ask her to put my letters on it; and then do you bring them up, and see how quick you can be. — What, Joe? Not going? Well, come again, and you shall do the talking next time."

II.

"I love the mystery of a female missal."

BYRON.

THE decorative "Caligula" returned, bearing a tray full of letters, presenting it with a bow so profound that he lost his balance, and fell headlong upon the floor. His master threw him a nickel, declared he was "the indispensable adjunct of his life," and ordered him to "scamper."

The correspondence was of no especial interest, judging by the indifference with which it was received. All business letters were directed to the firm, and went to the office. These were merely a few personal notes of invitation, an upholsterer's bill, a publisher's reply to a question concerning a new book, and the like; nothing more, except one dainty missive, written on cream-tinted linen paper, and sealed with light-blue wax, bearing the initial "S."

The graceful feminine hand was quite new to Mr. Kirke; and he could not recall at the moment a single one of his lady acquaintances whose surname began with "S," unless it was Kate Stanley whom he had just left down-stairs. This certainly was not Kate's writing; moreover, the letter was postmarked "Nar-ransauce, Maine." Who ever heard of such a town? Mr. Kirke had been something of a traveller for a man

of his years, but had never visited Maine; and it was singular, to say the least, that a lady correspondent should suddenly spring up unbidden from the soil of that rock-bound State. She was not a client: a client would have addressed the firm.

He held the letter for some moments, rather reluctant to break the seal, and dispel the little charm of mystery. Perhaps, after all, it was one of the strong-minded, asking his money or influence for some "scheme" more or less absurd. He had had his share of mendicants begging for schemes; and she might have heard of his gullibility, though ignorant, it seemed, of the street and number of his residence. He had no mind to be softly entreated: still it was necessary to open the letter, and read what she had to say.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Forgive me. What have I said or done to cause this mistake?"

"Oh, a mistake, is it? It looks like it," thought the reader.

"I did not know what you meant that night when you put the letter in my hands, or I would not have received it as I did."

"What letter? Who on earth is she?" He turned now to the third page for the signature.

"Ever yours sincerely,

EVELYN S."

"Why, the plot thickens. Who is Evelyn? Never heard the name outside of a book. It would be a

satisfaction to know the surname, whether Smith or Sawyer; but it will come to me as I go on."

He returned with increasing curiosity to the first page.

"You say I must have divined this. Indeed you are wrong. If you had a preference for either of us, — mind, I say only a preference, — it was natural it should be for Theodate, for it is with her you have chiefly conversed; while I have sat near, listening or not, as it chanced, and I confess often wrapped in my own sad thoughts. But we are both so much older than yourself, that these little conversations seemed to us the most harmless things in the world: it was like two sisters chatting with a younger brother, listening to his hopes and plans for the future, and giving in return our sage, elderly advice."

"Good soul! Can't remember a word of it! When did I ever meet these old ladies?" thought the young man, with a sudden fear that his mind was going.

"I do not see how you could possibly have made this mistake, when we are each of us more than twenty-six years old, and you are not twenty-two."

"I am twenty-five, my lady; but you fill me with terrible apprehensions. Am I a discarded lover? For if not B. I. Kirke, who am I?"

"We were frank with you" —

"*We?* It seems I loved them both!"

"But forgive me if my great grief has made me selfish and thoughtless. You are young, my dear boy, or you would know there is more in you than can be killed by this."

"If I have come to death's door, it's high time to stop. Of course this is meant for somebody else; and,

for the first time in my life, I've been meddling with other people's letters."

He turned again to the superscription, which seemed legible enough.

"Kirke, beyond a peradventure. And if that's not a 'B,' what is it? 'I' for Ingraham, too: as good an 'I' as you'll find in the alphabet. — Stop! Some people make a 'J' in that way — I don't respect them for it — but she might have meant it for a 'J.' Is there a Bartholomew Jones Kirke in this city? If so, a heavy blow awaits him," rapidly turning the leaves of a directory. "Poor boy, not twenty-two. There are Kirkes on Blue Island, John and Peter; he may belong to one of those, not to any of my family. I don't see what I can do but seal up the letter and post it, and trust to chance for Bartholomew's getting it."

But he did not seal it immediately. Some charm, either in the subject-matter or the delicate chirography, held him spell-bound.

"I don't understand her blundering so in that superscription. She has a perfect command of the pen; not that she really forms her letters: who does? But they glide into one another with such regularity that the words are unmistakable, all but my name."

He strictly forbore glancing at the third page, — one must draw the line somewhere, — but what he had already read he re-read, slowly, with thoughtful eyes, and a smile of genuine admiration. Few young men, perhaps, have lingered with such pleasure over a rejected proposal.

"I'd like to see how Kate Stanley would manage the thing! If she'd do it so handsomely, I'd almost —

wouldn't take the risk, though!" with a wise shrug of the shoulders. "Why, she actually begs pardon for being so lovable, the charming creature! She had no wish to trifle with you, my poor Bartholomew, and you're the only one to blame; 'of this I'll put myself on the country,' " said the young man in quaint law phrase. And folding the enigmatical letter, he replaced it in the envelope, which he sealed again with blue wax, stamping it with a pictorial charade, "Fare" over an old-fashioned well-sweep, making the word "Farewell."

"That will annihilate him at the outset, — if he ever sees it," dropping the letter into a street mail-box, and keeping on to his own office, which bore the sign "Kirke & Randall."

Mr. Ephraim Randall was a gray-haired man of twenty years' experience in law; but his name came second, for he brought neither money nor family influence into the new firm, — only unusual technical knowledge, sound judgment, and a capacity for hard work. He was happily quite independent of his junior partner, consulting him merely out of mock courtesy; but it did seem to Mr. Randall, on this particular afternoon, that the dullard might have surmised which was the plaintiff in "the Brown suit" without an elaborate explanation, and that he need not have punned upon the words in such a light-minded way. Life, to Mr. Randall, a family man, was a serious affair, and the very breath of that life was the law; and, when he laid down "the points of a case," he wished to be heard with becoming respect and solemnity. He was pleased with the partnership, finding it a great advantage to him-

self; and "young Kirke was never troublesome," so he told his wife. Indeed, when he chose to keep idlers in his own private office, out of the way of the working partner, he became a positive help. Mr. Randall always spoke of him indulgently, as an "upright, well-meaning fellow," but withheld his opinion of his intellect. What, indeed, could he think of a lawyer who actually wanted to keep his clients out of most of their law-suits, and would have settled their disputes amicably on the spot, if he had had his way? What excuse could be made for a young man who did not want to take a case "unless there was justice in it;" whereas every sane practitioner knows a case is not tried in the name of justice, but in the name of the client?

Ben's taste in reading was very much against him. Novels might be winked at: Mr. Randall had read them himself in his youth, but had never wasted time, not he, on poetry — vaporous stuff — or on science, which is equally unsatisfactory, and more unsettling, tending directly to atheism. Works of this sort were injuring the youth's brain, and unfitting him for the solid, profitable reading which looked out so invitingly through the glass doors of the office library. The senior partner pitied Judge Kirke for the disappointment he evidently felt in his son, but it did not become him to discuss so delicate a subject with the unhappy father.

"You took him in with a fair understanding that nothing was to be expected of him. Still, I can't give up all hope. He's slow in developing, but I believe there's the making of a good lawyer in him," sighed the judge, perversely resolved not to see that his son

had been forced into a position entirely unsuited to his natural capacity and inclination.

Ben's private office, like his apartments at home, was elegantly appointed; and the law-books it contained had a well-regulated, orderly look, as if held too sacred for use. When Mr. Randall stepped in this afternoon to look for a missing paper in "the Brown suit," the young man had a Mitchell's atlas on the table before him, and his forefinger was travelling carefully up and down the party-colored map of Maine.

"What new notion is it?" thought the older lawyer, finding the missing paper under a pile of books, and going quietly away with it, leaving the young man muttering to himself, —

"Narransauc? Narransauc? Wonder if she got that name right any more than B. I. Kirke? — Yes, here it is. Huzza! An attractive little place, too, sitting on a river-bank, gazing at its reflection in the water. I like the name, — Indian, of course, — and the chances are it's a good place for fishing. Down with Newport, the rose that all are praising! Let James and Molly have their party to themselves, since they are so 'particular;' and I'll slip out of the way and run up to Maine. Why have I so neglected that grand old State? It's becoming a famous resort; and the seacoast is wonderfully picturesque, it's said. Mount Desert — now, I half promised Danforth I'd go there with him last year. Let's see, Narransauc is nowhere near; it's inland, and pretty well up; yes, but I could take it on the way. There are ponds in the neighborhood, probably, — at any rate, brooks, — and I've never yet had enough of troutng. — Randall," as

the senior walked by the door, perusing a long document, "suppose I should take a fancy to run off for a vacation earlier than usual; you'd find it something of a relief, wouldn't you? Business wouldn't suffer?"

Mr. Randall's yellowish white visage, almost as smoothly polished as an ivory chess-man, took on a smile of quiet amusement, which he was at no pains to conceal.

"No, my boy; with the extra attention I should be obliged to devote to it, I think we may safely say our business would not suffer from your absence. But where are you going, and what's the haste?"

"Well, I was behind time last year, and got to the Land of the Sky in a crowd: so I thought I'd be wiser this time, and start before the rush. I haven't settled on a place, though. Weren't Mrs. Randall and the girls rather enthusiastic about Mount Desert?"

"Very," returned Mr. Randall, rapt again in the Brown suit, "I think we may safely say very."

The tone was dreamy and inexpressive. Mr. Kirke decided that it would be useless to seek further information from that quarter. Moreover, he was by no means sure he should go to Mount Desert, or even to Maine. In fact, the Narransauc plan was merely a floating idea, which would have passed into oblivion, but for the persistency with which that letter kept coming back to Mr. Kirke. There seemed to be no getting rid of it. In vain it was remanded to all the city suburbs, with "mis-sent" strongly italicized in the corner; in vain the "I" was transformed into a "J," at a venture: still, after short intervals of searching for another owner, the letter invariably returned on that

silver tray, and was offered again with the same ornamental flourish by the tiny "Caligula."

"How long is it doomed to walk the earth?" thought Mr. Kirke, enjoying, at each re-appearance, a solitary laugh; for he had confided the story to no one. "I've half a mind to give it a few weeks' rest; and perhaps, when I take a trip to Maine, I can find Miss Evelyn and restore it to her. Is she a summer boarder at Narransauc? That has been my opinion all along, and has inclined me toward the town. Miss Evelyn — she seems to exist without a surname — is certainly refined and fastidious, and would not rusticate in a spot that fell far short of Eden."

And all the while Miss Kate Stanley was dropping in to lunch or dine with the Kirkes, and the Newport plan, never agreeable to the young man, was growing positively distasteful.

"Mother," he announced one morning at breakfast, "by your leave I'm going to take a little run up to Mount Desert or the Isles of Shoals before the season begins."

The gentle lady was apprehensive in a moment.

"My son, you are not well. I have feared you were applying yourself too closely, and now your appetite has quite failed," said she tenderly, passing him the honey.

"He prefers *drones' honey*; don't you, Ben?" asked Gertrude slyly, the wit of the family.

The young man looked up inquiringly. The expression was new to him, but he thought his sister could not have coined it.

"Is that one of your learned quotations?" said he

with a frown of annoyance, for his father was looking on, evidently amused by his daughter's sharpness.

"It has a delusive sound of meaning something," said Lucy reflectively. "Yet I don't see what it can mean but empty nothing. Are you going to Mount Desert to gather drones' honey, Ben, and then coming to Newport to share it with the rest of the party?"

"No; I shall want every drop of it myself. And what made you fancy I should turn up at Newport at all?"

"Now, Ben, you're not going to be contrary, and disappoint us, after all that's been said and planned!"

"I don't remember that I've ever committed myself to any plans," replied the vexatious brother dryly. "James and Molly are said to be very particular, and I'm still more so, for I choose to have no company but my own."

And this was all he would say; and the sympathetic mother pondered over it, suspecting some underlying meaning that involved annoyance with Kate; but she wisely refrained from comment.

"It's one of his odd notions. He has taken his camera and gone off to Maine just to tease us," explained Gertrude to the discomfited Miss Stanley.

"Yes; but he'll join us at Newport, you may be very sure of that," added peace-making Lucy. "There's one thing to be said of Ben: he's always a great deal better than his word."

III.

*"From the dusty path there opens
Eastward an unknown way."*

BRYANT.

"I WOULD be greatly obliged to any one who would tell me just where I am going, and what I intend to do after I arrive there," mused Mr. Kirke, under his travelling-cap, as the cars rattled along through a stretch of level country in the very heart of Maine.

The morning had been closely veiled in white; but it was now past noon, the sky was of a clear and vivid blue, and the sunshine fell warmly on the quiet green fields and on the old farmhouses, which turned their backs derisively upon the railroad, unwilling to countenance the frivolity of the travelling-world. Ghosts of departed dandelions haunted the wayside; feathered pollen sailed aimlessly through the summer air; a bee emerged from a buttercup, having drained it of its last drop of waiting honey.

"The sunshine and the green fields seem to have reached a mutual understanding, but they answer none of my questions. Is there a bureau of information, I wonder, at any of these stations, that will kindly enlighten me? Eighty miles farther to Narransauc," consulting his guide-book.

And then he looked out of the window at a brown hen meandering through the tall grass of a meadow, now partially hidden, now emerging, pecking leisurely at the bowing clover-tops.

"The settlements seem to be growing rather sparse; but, then, the rail always runs through the dullest part of the country," said he, rousing himself, and looking about upon his fellow-passengers, whom he had hitherto regarded with scarcely any human interest.

The car had not been well filled at the outset, and by this time half the occupants had dropped off at the various stations on the way.

"It's a dreadful warm day for June," he heard a woman just behind him announce in thunder-tones to a neighbor across the aisle, who responded with a sympathetic nod of her aged but well-preserved bonnet. "Just the weather for cheese, and no weather at all for butter." And after a pause, "How's Sabrina? I hear she ain't very rugged."

"Well, she ain't, that's a fact. Appetite's poor. Won't eat a morsel of breakfast, without it's a piece of mince-pie."

Mr. Kirke cast an unmeaning smile toward the landscape. This was the first scrap of provincial dialect that had met his ears, the first reminder of his arrival in the region of "perpetual pie."

"Is this a foreshadowing of my bill of fare? It's high time I should make acquaintance with some one, and inquire as to the resources of Narransauc. It would refresh me to know for a certainty that it has a hotel. Wonder if there is anybody in the car who would be likely to know?"

In the seat before him sat a rather rustic-looking man, beside a well-dressed young woman with an infant in her arms. Absorbed in his own thoughts, Mr. Kirke had not noticed the eager gestures the baby was making in his own direction.

"No, no, Mamie; no, no," pleaded the mother in a gentle, reasoning tone, as if she regarded the little creature as a responsible but misguided human being.

The woman's profile was delicately cut, with a low brow, piquant nose, and sensitive mouth. The man was older, and evidently of inferior clay, — his features coarse and noticeably one-sided, his gestures uncouth and angular.

"She must have married him in a fit of humility, poor girl!" thought our young lawyer. "His hair is as rough as a besom, and there's a glint of white in it, suggesting that he is no longer young: so, I dare say, this is his second wife. What is it Boswell says of second marriages? They are 'experience overcome by hope.' A lively hope for him, in this case; but think of her despair! Wish she'd turn her head. If I could get a full view of her face, I could tell whether she's the sort of woman to let her husband know she repents, or whether she's an angel and tries to spare his feelings."

His wish was unexpectedly gratified. The baby, who had long been coveting his watch-seal, now made a sudden dash for it, and would have plunged head-long, if the mother had not turned quickly, and arrested the tiny thief with the strong arm of the law.

"No, no, baby must not have it: it belongs to the gentleman," said mamma correctively, at the same

time glancing at the owner of the watch with a pretty blush of apology.

It was but for a moment, and then her face was turned away again, and she and papa were laughing over naughty baby's kleptomania; and naughty baby was given an orange, as a preventive of tears and other unpleasant demonstrations likely to follow her chagrin at the uncompleted robbery. Mr. Kirke had had but a glimpse of the mother's face, yet it was enough to justify and confirm his previous admiration.

"Why, it's like a fleeting, beautiful dream! It is like one of the lost loves of the poets. Where did she get that look of exquisite refinement, — the wife of a country lout?"

Baby, resenting the interference of justice, and spurning the orange as an ignoble substitute for the bright gem, was screaming by this time indignantly; and the father, in the desperate, energetic fashion common to his incapable sex, was dancing her up and down, and whistling quite ineffectually. The mother's crimson, perplexed face appealed to Mr. Kirke's chivalry.

"Here, here! Don't let the little thing cry like that," he exclaimed, leaning forward, and hurriedly tossing over both watch and seal. If it had been a priceless diamond, he would have done the same. An infant was to him a species of dangerous maniac, to be soothed and suppressed at all hazards.

The mother bent her graceful neck in acknowledgment; while the terrible child seized the seal with what the young man could not but regard as demoniacal glee, crunched it between her wanton little teeth,

and would have made a meal of the watch also, if the prudent father had not hidden it in his huge, plebeian hand.

"Much obliged," said he, turning half around to Mr. Kirke, though never losing sight of the little cormorant. "She can't keep her eyes open much longer; and, when she dozes off, you shall have your property back again."

"Was this the child's usual method of going to sleep? If she could shriek like this when 'dozing off,' what must be the pitch of her voice when fully awake?" queried the young man, regarding her with astonishment not unmingled with respect. But, as he gazed, behold those infantile orbs fast withdrawing behind their fringed curtains, those white teeth gradually loosing their hold of the choice golden morsel; till at last the watch slips from the drooping mouth, and the vanquished rebel lets her weary flaxen head fall confidently upon the paternal shoulder. It was not to be denied that in sleep she made a pretty picture. One plump hand softly pressed papa's whiskers, the other fell like a careless rose-petal over his coat-collar; while the rest of her little person lay prone across his breast, with one unguarded foot partially lodged in his vest-pocket. Under these circumstances, she was beyond criticism; and the young man forgave all her waking sins, for the pleasure she afforded him by her inimitable pose.

Not so the mother: scarcely looking at her beautiful offspring, she took a book from her satchel and began to read, turning the pages slowly with a neatly gloved finger. The cars clattered and bounced, baby stirred

and moaned, the father restored the watch and chain to the owner with sundry comments; but still the unnatural mother read on. Into what far-away land of romance was she drifting? What writer was magician enough to deaden her to the common distractions of travel; above all, to cause her to forget her own child?

Mr. Kirke was himself a dreamer and a novel-reader, but he hardly liked to see a mother so absorbed: it augured ill for her children and home. He wished he could make out the title of the book; he hoped it was not exactly trash. The woman was beautiful and had interested him: he did not like to find her downright commonplace, like her husband. By an adroit forward movement of his head while dropping the window-blind, he secured a sidewise peep over her shoulder. She was reading the "Imitation of Christ." So that was the sort of light literature she carried with her in the cars? Well, there was a certain fitness in it; for the unfortunate mother of such a child would naturally stand in peculiar need of religious consolation. Still he did not remember to have observed any thing of the sort in his travels heretofore. She was no ordinary person, as he had said from the first; and hereafter he should have great respect for his own intuitive judgments.

Presently an urchin appeared in the aisle, bearing a basket of mixed refreshments. The husband bought some "pop-corn," and, after nibbling a few kernels, tossed the bag into his wife's lap, declaring he "couldn't make any hand eating 'em, his teeth were so scattering." But even this failed to arouse her. She nodded carelessly, and turned another leaf. The

husband's small brown eyes twinkled with fun as he nodded to Mr. Kirke.

"You see, mister, she's so taken up with that book, that she's kind of oblivious. That's just her way. I told 'em she'd forget there was a baby aboard, and if we got it alive to Narransauc, 'twould be no thanks to her."

Mr. Kirke looked his surprise at this extraordinary speech; but the mother had not heard it, apparently.

"Did you speak to me? Shall I take the baby now?" she asked, without, however, dropping the book.

Mr. Crabtree's eyes twinkled again, and he gave Mr. Kirke a tolerably full view of his "scattering teeth."

"This little one's folks is dead, and we're fetchin' of it home to its grandmother," he explained.

"Ah? Very kind of you, certainly."

"Well, I don't know how we could have done any other ways. You see, I was off to a church convention at Bath, and my wife wrote and asked if I couldn't contrive it somehow."

"Your wife!"

The exclamation was involuntary.

"Yes; and she wrote to Evelyn too, — Evelyn was up to Boston — and asked her if she'd meet me at Potter's Junction, and help along with the baby."

"Evelyn?"

There was more than surprise in the young man's tones now: there was something like awe. Had he found the author of that mysterious migratory letter which was lying in his breast-pocket awaiting an owner?

"Evelyn, did you say?"

The young lady turned quickly on hearing her name pronounced by a stranger. She had taken the baby, and was administering to it a cooky, by instalments.

“Why, yes, this is Evelyn, — Miss Searle, I should say. Shall I make you acquainted with Miss Searle?” added Mr. Crabtree, proud of himself for recollecting his manners; for in his code politeness required him to introduce his lady friend to any one with whom he happened to have a few moments’ conversation. He had already “made her acquainted” with sundry unknown people, who had merely bowed in acknowledgment, without divulging their own names or places of residence. But Mr. Kirke seemed fully impressed with the honor done him, doffing his travelling-cap in the most courtly manner, and begging leave to present his card to both parties.

Miss Searle accepted hers graciously, but with a slight air of reserve, letting it fall unheeded in her lap. It was plain that she knew better than to relish being thrust in this compulsory way upon the notice of an entire stranger. Possibly her disapproval blinded her judgment in dividing the cooky; for she meted out too liberal a share, and the covetous baby received it into an already overburdened mouth, with the result which might have been expected, — coughing, wheezing, and other symptoms of strangulation. Miss Searle was terrified; but Mr. Crabtree rose to the occasion, laughed derisively, seized the stricken baby, and patted it on the back with all the unconcern of the father of a family, who has performed the like office for six infant victims in due succession, and thinks nothing of it.

"There, there, now go back to her, sonny, and tell her not to abuse you again. — Strange how I keep calling of her a boy! You see my three youngest are all boys, so it comes kind of natural," addressing Mr. Kirke once more, unconsciously attracted by such a good listener.

"Will you not come here and share my seat," suggested the young man thoughtfully, "and give the young lady more room for the child?"

"That's a good notion of yours, sir. Thank you, don't care if I do," returned Mr. Crabtree, complying at once. He had not fancied the stranger's appearance, considering him "too lazy to breathe, — one of these pompous fellows that own half the railroad, likely enough, riding round on a free pass;" but, finding him so civil-spoken and agreeable, Mr. Crabtree concluded that it would be no more than fair to reveal to him his own name, and perhaps entertain him with a little light conversation.

"My name's Crabtree, sir," shoving himself into the seat as clumsily as if he had been one of his own cartloads of gravel. "Yes, you see this little tot's father and mother belonged to our town, and was both drowned first of the month up to Moosehead. Can't see what possessed 'em to go out in a birch canoe without an Injun to paddle. Ever see one o' them birches? As tittlish as an egg-shell. Have to part your hair in the middle before you venture aboard, and then hold your breath till you strike shore. Lots of folks, first and last, gets upsot in them birches; but I never thought it of Eb Wood. He ain't in the habit of going up there, either. But they both took a notion

to go and see her brother Jeff; and then next thing this happened, and they were fetched down here to be buried. I tell you 'twas a pretty solemn funeral, — a young couple so, with this one child; but they were both of 'em church-members, and prepared, as we hope, for the great change. Miss Plummer of Bath came and took the baby home, but on account of sickness in the family couldn't keep it any longer; and we're fetching of it back to the old folks. — Look out, Evelyn, can't you get his mind off of eating? His grandma'am will be disappointed if he don't call for his supper when he gets there. She'll have it all ready. — Beats all," he added, with a confidential dropping of the voice and partial closing of the left eye, "beats all what a difference there is in folks. Now, there's my wife; if I had her along with me, I shouldn't be bothering my head about that young one. I never saw a child so full of mischief to the square inch, or such a catawauler; but my wife could fix it up all complete, and no help needed."

Mr. Kirke sincerely wished the capable Mrs. Crabtree was "along," and pitied poor, tired Miss Searle with all his heart.

"The child seems to have extraordinary lungs, and a furious temper; but I believe such things indicate teeth," said he sarcastically. Then, after a pause, "Do I understand you, Mr. Crabtree, that you are going to Narransauc? The fact is, I am going there myself."

"You don't say so! — Hear that, Evelyn?" said Mr. Crabtree with a resounding laugh, which awakened the suspicion in Mr. Kirke's mind that Narran-

sauc was by no means a popular resort. Miss Searle flashed him a side smile, and the orphaned baby reached over her shoulder and maliciously showered a handful of cooky-crumbs on his knee.

"Kirke, Kirke,—none related to our Kirkes, I guess?" said Mr. Crabtree with another laugh. "No, I thought not. There's a family of that name in town—a shiftless set. They'll all play cards and smoke, if not drink."

"Have you any hotels?" asked Mr. Kirke.

There was no reply, but a long pause, during which the young man felt that he was undergoing scrutiny.

"Maybe you've got some interest in our stone-quarries? Folks come here from quite a distance after grave-stones; considered the best granite you'll find in the New-England States."

The young man smiled indolently; but, before he could plead not guilty of travelling in behalf of a cemetery, Mr. Crabtree had hazarded another conjecture.

"Word has gone out, so I've heard lately, that our railroad bonds are good for nothing; and I've rather expected a lot of sharpers would be along buying of 'em up for a speculation. But they'll miss their guess, for the bonds are pretty nigh up to par." This with a shrewd, good-humored snapping of the tiny brown orbs, as if to warn the Chicago lawyer that his crafty designs were foreseen and circumvented.

"Oh, well, as for myself, I'm merely taking a run up here for amusement!" returned the young man, directing a look of supreme innocence toward the back of Miss Searle's bonnet. What a heavy coil of

fair hair, and how well her head was set on her shoulders !

"Is your scenery really so fine, Mr. Crabtree?" Narransauc might be set in a sandbank, for aught he knew to the contrary; but it is always safe to say "scenery" to a resident.

A light broke over Mr. Crabtree's crooked face. "Well, they do say you scarce ever saw a prettier place than what ours is in the summer season. — That's so, ain't it, Evelyn?"

"Indeed it is," replied the young lady, with another tantalizing side smile. Perhaps she knew her profile was worth studying.

"There's Vi'let Hill, and there's the Cascade; and if you come just a'purpose for the scenery — Can't contrive, though, where you've heard so much about us," went on Mr. Crabtree inquiringly. "Any acquainted with folks that's been this way? We've had a plenty of 'em, to be sure. — Oh, maybe you've got word of our mineral spring? That's up in my orchard: been analyzed by Professor What's-name in Brunswick; and I won't undertake to tell the ingredients, but it's good for any number of complaints."

"I think I'm more interested in your — your fishing," said Mr. Kirke at a bold venture.

"Yes, yes; that's so, — our ponds. Well, we've got three, with more perch and pickerel in 'em than you can shake a stick at, — not to mention the trout-brook in Cobb's meadow."

Mr. Kirke sat bolt upright. Had Providence chosen to smile on his wild undertaking? Were all things conspiring to render it a reasonable, every-day affair? Here

he had pricked forth into the desert; and lo, it was blossoming like the rose! "Kirke's luck," he thought, smiling. "I'm delighted to hear my good opinion of your fishing confirmed, Mr. Crabtree. And now, if you will please inform me how many hotels you have, and which is the best one, I'll be greatly indebted."

He was still sitting upright and alert, and Mr. Crabtree looked at him with growing respect.

"Well, there's two in the place; but there's only one where *you'd* want to put up, and that's the Druid. Follow along from the deep-o to the bridge hill; or you better take a hack, if you ain't used to walking. You'll find Mrs. Simpson a complete good cook, and the table always sot with sarse," drawing his crooked mouth around to the left side, as if to close the subject, his usual method of marking a double period.

Another hour elapsed, during which the infant showed signs of utter depravity, and Miss Searle's face like a blush-rose "drooped o'er the infant bud" in mortification and despair. This was too much for Mr. Kirke's humanity; and, as Mr. Crabtree looked on in indifference, he begged the privilege of taking the unhappy child himself, and carrying it up and down the aisle for change of scene. This was of course for the relief of the young lady, who seemed duly grateful; but Mr. Crabtree laughed as heartily as if Mr. Kirke and the baby were perambulating for his amusement. The young man ought to have been insensible to ridicule, but I fear he was not. I fear his sentiments toward the hilarious Mr. Crabtree were really vindictive, all the more as the baby plucked at his hair in a manner that attracted marked attention from the passengers.

Fortunately the end of the journey was near, and Mr. Crabtree soon announced that Narransauc was in sight.

"I presume you'd like to have me name some of the residences," said he, pointing an obliging forefinger toward the distant landscape.

Mr. Kirke planted the hindering baby on the seat, and looked out.

"Over yonder, top o' that hill, you see a house? — brick, painted a kind o' reddish brown, trimmings a little darker? You can't see it so well as you ought to, on account of the trees. Well, that's where Evelyn — Miss Searle — lives. — Look out, Evelyn, there's somebody at your house shaking a handkerchief; guess it's Theodate."

"Theodate?" thought the young man. "She is an old acquaintance; I'd like to see her myself."

Miss Searle had sprung up eagerly, and was gazing out. Far away amid the mass of coloring could be very faintly discerned a blotch of white; and toward this dim object, the supposititious handkerchief of Theodate, she shook her own handkerchief with a smile and nod. Mr. Kirke commiserated Theodate, because she lost the smile. It was not like the one he had received from the same source a little while ago, — a merely conventional ripple, playing for a moment on the surface: this smile was the real thing; it rose glowing from the heart, and suffused the whole face with warmth and light.

"You live in a sightly place, Evelyn; only you ought to have some of them big trees cut down. In my opinion, they kind of pizen the land. That used to

be a great house for young men to go calling, — before her sisters were married off," added Mr. Crabtree with an explanatory wink toward Mr. Kirke. "But there's no great of a rush round there now, as I've heard of. Look out, Evelyn, or you and Theodate will both be turning the old maid's corner."

This coarse raillery, so odious to a person of ordinary refinement, caused Miss Searle to shrink away from the window, with a slight, tremulous swaying of the neck, like the recoil of a sensitive plant at the touch of a hand.

Mr. Kirke was so incensed by Mr. Crabtree's brutality, that in revenge he handed him the baby.

And as they had now arrived at the station, he hastened, with his courtliest bow, to proffer his services to Miss Searle; feeling it a privilege to let her see, that, though somewhat awkward as a baby's nurse, there were yet some things he could do with absolutely faultless grace.

IV.

*"The bee,
All dusty as a miller, takes his toll
Of powdery gold, and grumbles. What a day
To sun me and do nothing!"*

LOWELL.

MR. KIRKE stood on the platform of the little station, gazing after his late travelling-companions, till a thick cloud of dust wrapped them from sight, like the fabled cap of invisibility. Narransauc seemed to be one of the quiet, unknown towns aptly described as "geographical expressions," with no particular "scenery" so far discoverable, except clumps of trees, a sandy soil, and the hint of a dark river glooming somewhere in the background beyond a wooded slope.

The station had a subdued air, suggesting that business was allowed to interfere as little as possible with repose. There was a drowsy hum of talk between the baggage-master and an express-agent; while the hackman of the "Druid," and the hackman of the "Narransauc," exchanged a few dry jokes with another driver, mounted on the Latium stage. The chief liveliness of the scene was due to two young children, a boy and girl, who quarrelled over a banana, and both fell to wailing, with their heads against the outside corner of the building; reminding Mr. Kirke of

the "Jews weeping at the walls of Jerusalem," — a sight familiar in his Eastern travels.

"So this is Narransauc; a handful of houses, a church, — there must be a church somewhere, — a blacksmith's shop, and it seems two hotels," thought our tourist, handing his fishing-tackle to the driver, and entering the Druid coach, the sole passenger.

It was impossible not to feel a little vexed with himself. Why had he selected this dull hollow, instead of one of the really choice resorts so thickly scattered over New England? But he had not ridden far before his mood changed. As they ascended the "bridge hill," commanding a view of the village, behold a lovely, sparkling river with wooded banks, a long, wide stretch of meadow, and on three sides bold mountains rising blue in the distance!

"This will do for me," he said with a smile of content. "Let James and Molly have Newport to themselves. Is that Miss Searle's home, that hill over there, where the purple light falls? And are Evelyn and Theodate twin-sisters? Evelyn is a saint, enshrined in purple light. Naturally she travels with a Prayer-Book, has outgrown lovers, and begs pardon for being so lovable. I can understand it now: it is the environment. I can see how she looked when she wrote to my double; just as she looked when she reasoned with that baby: in short, like an angel. But I'm not sure I fancy angels; on the whole, I give the preference to mortals. Shall I ever see her again? She scarcely looked at me, and never uttered a word, till I took that imp of a baby. Wouldn't know me again, doesn't remember my name, and hasn't kept

my card. Not flattering. Perhaps the twin-sister is less heavenly. I'd like to see Theodate."

The Druid was a spacious hotel, built a century ago, when the town was young and precocious, holding out a delusive promise of growth. The massive doors had heavy iron latches, and the front one a knocker as aggressive as a war-club. The yellow glory of the large hall floor was obscured here and there by braided woollen mats. Mr. Kirke's arrival was apparently a surprise; for the sleepy, portly, baldheaded landlord met him with a stare, and, instead of greeting him, said to the porter who was setting down the luggage, —

"When are the old doctor's remains going to be fetched?"

"To-morrow mornin'."

"We were looking for a corpse to-night," was the landlord's cheerful explanation to Mr. Kirke, who bowed meekly, and entered the office, feeling that he was a disappointment at the outset, a poor substitute indeed for the expected "remains."

The floor of the office was of the same radiant hue as the hall, but so warped that all the chairs halted on three legs and held up the fourth, like a flock of lame sheep.

"Pretty hot, ain't it, though?" quoth the landlord sociably, recovering in a measure from his sense of injury regarding the deceased doctor, and smiling as he entered a grated enclosure used as a desk. Behind this grating his departed grandsire had once stood, and at this very counter poured West India and New England rum into thick glass tumblers, stirring in the brown sugar with a toddy-stick, for the delectation of travellers. There was no liquor of any sort there now,

it is needless to say, — only pens, ink, and a day-book, in which Mr. Kirke was asked to inscribe his name below that of Miss Anne Belcher of Boston, who had arrived on the noon train. This day-book was a modern affair, and Mr. Simpson had a pride in it, as well as in the bright key with label attached, which he now gave his guest, summoning the factotum Tom to show him to his room; though he “hoped he would look round all he pleased, and make himself perfectly at home.”

The antiquity of the house delighted the young man, as well as its quaint appointments. The piano in the parlor claimed to have originated in London in 1725, and was composed of rosewood, white holly, and ebony; six feet long, two feet wide, with mahogany legs and brass casters. Mr. Kirke's face brightened; he was becoming deeply interested. At the tea-table it was a new experience to find himself placed on the footing of an old acquaintance; the friendly Mrs. Simpson “making conversation” with himself and Miss Belcher, while she poured the tea. Her husband was more than willing to aid her in her social duties; but, unfortunately, when he talked he forgot every thing else: hence, it was her policy to keep him quiet. Mr. Crabtree once said, “Simpson is like that little boat of Andrew Cromwell's, — a terrible small boat with an awful big whistle; and, when he blowed the whistle, the boat always stopped.”

“I'm so glad you like the looks of our town, Mr. Kirke,” said the friendly landlady, with a nod of her pepper-and-salt curls.

“You'll have to see Violet Hill, Miss Belcher. I

guess I'll drive you up," remarked the equally friendly landlord, forgetting to pass the butter.

"Won't you help to the pease, Mr. Simpson?" said his wife reprovingly. "'Blessed abundance' is the name of these pease, Miss Belcher; and *we* think they're pretty early."

Presently the door opened, and a man sauntered into the dining-room with no other ceremony than a prolonged whistle. "Been hunting all over the house for a match to light my pipe. Where do you keep 'em, anyhow?"

"Why, Andrew, we keep them on the kitchen mantel-piece, in an iron box," replied the neighborly old lady, surprised at the weakness of the question.

But Andrew was too dilatory to go at once, even for the pleasure of a smoke. "Look here, Simpson," lounging up to the table, and laying a small article beside the host's plate, "that's the kind of blind-fastener you want, ain't it?"

"Looks like it," replied Mr. Simpson, slowly considering the subject between his sips of tea.

"There, I said so. I knew *you'd* like it. It's the women-folks that make the bother, and keep you trotting. Now, I've been to Latium twice for a blind-fastener; and Evelyn Searle ain't suited yet."

Mr. Kirke grew suddenly attentive.

"Guess they're 'most too particular up there on the hill," remarked the landlord.

"Oh, no!" said his wife. "Andrew has been plaguing their lives out of them. You know you have, Andrew. Now, if you're going after matches, look out not to hit my yeast-pitcher on the mantel-shelf.

And mind, Andrew, you promised to come next week to mend the sink by the water-barrel. — Clever boy,” she added benignly, as the door closed after him; “but if he gets that sink mended by next November, it’s all I expect. And Mr. Simpson’s so easy! I don’t see as I’m a grain better off than the young ladies on the hill.”

“Three girls up there all alone, and not a man among ’em,” murmured Mr. Simpson in a tone of heartfelt pity.

“Oh, well, Evelyn and Theodate are happier than the majority of married couples! Anybody would enjoy living with Evelyn, she has such a soothing way with her. (Won’t you pass the biscuit, Mr. Simpson?) I tell ’em they’re too care-free and happy for this world, up there in the clouds, — one of ’em a-painting, the other a-scribbling, and a nice little French girl to do the rough work.”

“Is the name Searle, do you say?” asked Mr. Kirke, with the air of a stranger who feigns a polite interest.

“Well, yes, the name of one is Searle; but we’ve got in the way of calling ’em ‘the young ladies.’ Evelyn is the last one left on the old Searle place; and she sent for an old crony of hers, a Wilder girl from Bangor way, to come and live with her,” replied Mr. Simpson. And then “the boat stopped” again; and his wife, alarmed at his growing interest in the conversation, struck in hurriedly, —

“Will you pass the butter, my dear? — Yes, and a great thing it was for Theodate. Her folks were never very well-to-do, and her father took to drink,

and she had to support the family ; but now they've all died off, and Theodate is ever so pleased to have a home with Evelyn, and a chance to set up a class in painting."

"So she is an artist?"

"Well, I don't know just what you'd call it. We think she paints handsome pictures. You can almost smell her roses. And her landscapes, too, we think they're as good as anybody's. — The cake, Mr. Simpson."

"And Miss Searle writes — poetry, perhaps?"

"Oh, no! Story books and pieces for the magazines. I don't believe but she could write poetry, though. I've a great mind to ask her if she won't make up some verses for our golden wedding, Moses, November next, the 27th; and we expect all our eight children to be here," said she, pausing, and looking at her guests, in anticipation of hearing them exclaim, "A golden wedding? You surprise me. You don't look over sixty."

But Miss Belcher was too rigidly truthful for that; and Mr. Kirke, not knowing what was expected of him, only said, —

"Ah! and have you lived in this house ever since your marriage, Mrs. Simpson?"

"Why, to be sure; and what's more we were married here, right by that east window; and old Mr. Searle the minister, Evelyn's grandfather, performed the ceremony."

"And the daughter is the last of her race, I think you said?"

"Yes, all but her uncle, Mellen Searle, and his

family. They live here in this town," replied the pleasant old lady, her heart going out more and more toward this "sociable young man" who took such an interest in village affairs.

"Why," said she after tea, to Moses, "he seems just like one of 'our folks,' and I hope he'll like to stay with us. Anyway, we'll do our best to make him have a good time."

Accordingly he was regaled that evening in the parlor with more conversation, and with the music of the past, which Miss Belcher evoked from the poor old cracked piano; and Mr. Simpson tried hard to keep awake and be agreeable, though he did fall asleep at last in his chair.

There was a degree of solemn excitement in the village next day, over the "old doctor's" funeral; though what name the old doctor had borne in life Mr. Kirke never heard. He busied himself most of the day in fishing; and Mrs. Simpson fried his trout for supper, but was obliged to leave him in the evening to the care of her somnolent husband, who would be but poor company, she feared. She remarked apologetically, as she drew on her gloves, that she wouldn't go a step, only it was a special church-meeting, and she felt it a duty.

"A Baptist dance," explained the irreverent Mr. Simpson to their guest, fond of shocking his devout wife, who hushed him with a "Why, Moses!"

"But I've got out a lot of books here," pointing to the table, "and you can read all you're a mind to."

Mr. Kirke thanked her. They were lives of presidents and other grandees, adorned with woodcuts of

the log cabins in which they were born. "Showing," the old lady said instructively, "how most of our great men have come up from ign'ance."

"Yes," he returned with a smile; "but I object to that moral, which is, 'Don't educate the masses, and you'll get presidents out of the slums.'"

The good lady looked rather scandalized. Had she been deceived in this fair-seeming young man? Could he be, after all, one of the dreadful free-thinking sort?

"Perhaps you have different ideas out in Chicago from what we have up here in Maine; *perhaps*," with a tinge of severity, "you think labor is degrading, and look down upon ladies that do their own work. But we haven't any aristocracy here. We consider that the Lord never intended us to shirk; and, rich or poor, we do our part. To be sure," relenting a little, "we do have some drones in the hive; but public opinion is against 'em up here, and they know it."

Mr. Kirke blushed. There were reasons dating from childhood why he could never hear the word "drone" without suspecting a personal application. Good Mrs. Simpson noted the blush, and her tender heart misgave her. "Good-by, a very pleasant time to you," said she, casting back a motherly smile through the crack of the door.

But he was not destined to a quiet evening with the sleeping landlord and the dead presidents. Mr. Crabtree soon entered, followed by a handsome St. Bernard dog with a dead chicken fastened about his neck, and close behind the dog a sandy-haired gentleman whom Mr. Crabtree announced as "Mr. Searle, well acquainted with your father, Judge Kirke."

It was a proud moment for Mr. Crabtree. He had been searching all day for Mr. Kirke, to let him know that Narransauc was not so far out of the world, after all ; that, in fact, it had its great men, second to none in Chicago or elsewhere. He made the introduction with a loud laugh. He had a laugh ready to express all shades of feeling ; it meant now that he hoped Mr. Kirke would be satisfied as to the town's gentility, of which he, Mr. Crabtree, had not been a fair sample. *He* had "no manners to brag of," and he knew it ; he was a "sing'd cat," giving no outward sign of his interior worth. But look now, *here* was a real gentleman, the best lawyer in the county, as well as an ex-congressman ; and if these facts did not come out in the course of conversation, then he, Mr. Crabtree, would know the reason why.

"Yes, I was well acquainted with your father, and am most happy to meet you, Mr. Kirke," said Mr. Searle with a cordial hand-grasp, which the young man returned in kind, looking up at, or more strictly down upon, the older gentleman with a deference which gratified Mr. Crabtree, as reflecting honor indirectly upon himself. "Yes, I knew your father when we were both young. He was a native of Andover, you know ; and I went there to school, and we were in the same classes. And years afterwards we travelled together. We were excellent friends," said the lawyer, who had not yet released Mr. Kirke's hand.

A sudden recollection flashed into the young man's mind, —

"You are not the gentleman who went to South America with my father?"

"The very same."

"Then I have often heard of you, sir. My father is very fond of referring to his South-American voyage, and to Mr. Mellen Searle. Is that the name?"

"Is he? I am glad to hear it," returned Mr. Searle with a glow of pleasure in his eyes, which immediately recalled to the young man the smile of the niece, Miss Evelyn Searle, as she saw her friend's figure in the distance from the car-window. It might be an accidental resemblance, but that smile was surely one of a thousand.

Here followed a series of anecdotes concerning the memorable voyage, not of absorbing interest to Mr. Crabtree, who broke into the conversation before long to address his dog, —

"Well, Bruno, you needn't look so meaching: I don't believe the folks have taken any notice of your necklace; and, if you'll promise not to rob any more hen-roosts, I'll take it off when we get home. — Well, Square, hadn't we better be going?"

Mr. Searle rose with some deliberation. "We shall expect an early call from you, Mr. Kirke. Mrs. Searle will be glad to know you, and I hope to have the honor of showing you some hospitality."

"H'm! If his wife will let him," thought Mr. Crabtree. "Bruno; here, Bruno," — to the dog who had retreated under the table.

"To-morrow will be Sunday," he added in a tone of sanctity, after a solemn clearing of the throat, as if by that act he drew a strict line between secular and religious conversation; "and we'd be glad to have

you come to our meetin', Congregational, and sit in our pew. *And*, if you're going to be any time among us, we should be pleased to have your help in the prayer-meeting and Sabbath school."

This last with the rising inflection, as was natural in addressing a stranger whose religious proclivities were unknown.

Mr. Kirke bit his lip. He had never heard "the holy whine" from this source before, and it struck him as much funnier than any of Mr. Crabtree's intentional jokes. He said he should attend church, and would be glad to accept the hospitality of Mr. Crabtree's pew.

And upon this the guests took their leave.

V.

*"Life with you
Glows in the brain, and dances in the arteries;
'Tis like the wine some joyous guest hath quaffed,
That glads the heart, and elevates the fancy."*

OLD PLAY: ANTIQUARY.

MR. SEARLE supposed he was doing Judge Kirke's son a favor in escorting him on Tuesday evening to Violet Hill, the old homestead where the "young ladies" lived. The young man had expressed a wish to go; but now, that they were on their way up the gradually ascending street, he found himself dreading the call. Miss Searle had been an unsocial traveling-companion, reading Thomas à Kempis in the cars. She probably had a dreamy mind, shut into itself in a sort of spiritual balloon, so to speak; and it was only people of a rarefied nature who could soar high enough to converse with her.

Of the two young ladies, he had less fear of Miss Wilder, because he had never seen her.

As they turned into the curved path leading to the house, they met a small boy trudging toward them, half concealed under a swaying forest of rhubarb stalks and leaves.

"They give 'em to me," cried the walking forest with an injured air, on being questioned as to his

spoils. "Evelyn said our folks could have all the rubub I's a mind to pick."

"All right," laughed Mr. Searle.

But, as both gentlemen had now turned short around, the boy looked back indignantly, his moon-shaped face showing in the umbrageous mass like a nondescript flower bursting into bloom. He thought they still doubted his claim to the "rubub," whereas Mr. Searle was only calling attention to the landscape.

They were on the summit of Violet Hill, commanding a broad view of four neighboring towns, the winding river, and three ponds, with an eastern horizon of snow-capped mountains.

The hill had been so named on account of its violet tinge; but, indeed, as they looked down, the whole world seemed to have borrowed the color. The light from the mountains was sifting through evening clouds of varying tint, but every cloud cast always a violet shadow. In the west the sun was sinking in golden light, and the east mourned him in fantastic purple and pink; but still, as far as the eye could reach, the soft and lovely violet everywhere prevailed.

"Is it like what you thought?" asked Mr. Searle, after a pause, as they both stood gazing with heads involuntarily bared.

"I don't know what I thought; but there's nothing to be said," replied the young man, drawing a long breath. "It's a revelation of itself."

"When I was a boy, I used to stand in the garden back of the house, and look down by the hour at that scene," said Mr. Searle in hushed tones. "And I never look at it now without thinking of what Fichte

says: 'The world is but the curtain by which an infinitely more perfect world is concealed from me.' I believe I should have been nearer heaven now, if I had never left this place," he added half sadly. "It belonged to me as the eldest son, but I gave it up to my brother John; and, when John died, the farm ran behind, and there's nothing raised on it now but grass and garden vegetables. I'll take you over the orchard some time, and the wood-lot; but we'll go into the house now, and make our call. — Are the young ladies in?" he asked of the nutbrown maid who answered the bell.

"Yes, sir; they's out in the orchard playing tag," she replied, wiping a smile from the corner of her mouth with her apron. "Walk in, sir. I'll call 'em d'rec'ly."

Rosa's frankness regarding family affairs was a daily trial to her young ladies.

"Tag? You probably mean calisthenics," said the rather fastidious Mr. Searle, as they were ushered into the parlor.

But Rosa was incorrigible. "No, sir, they's a-chasing one another lickety-split," emphasizing the dreadful remark by bringing her hand down upon a piano-key to kill a fly, which perished melodiously like a dying swan.

"You will find the young ladies are not very conventional," said Mr. Searle apologetically, as Rosa went to summon them. "They are great brain-workers; and some romping is necessary, perhaps, to keep up their health. I think Miss Wilder is rather the ringleader. My son Ozro says she took lessons

last summer in pistol-shooting of a young man who was visiting in town, but I regard this as an exaggeration. By the way, the young man was from Chicago, and knew your family well."

"Ah! What name?"

"I was about to tell you; had it a moment ago, but now it's gone. Strange how names fly from us."

"Very," assented Mr. Kirke, watching Mr. Searle's knitted brows with considerable interest. A young man from Chicago? Could it possibly have been the hero of the letter?

"Was the name long, or short?" he asked, wondering if it began with a "K," and was capable of being twisted into Kirke.

"'Twill come back presently," said Mr. Searle, spreading out his palm as if to grasp it in the air. "I'll have it soon. Yes, he knew your family well; and I was going to ask you about him last night, but forgot it."

Mr. Kirke chafed inwardly at these lapses of memory; but his thoughts were diverted now by the entrance of a vision in white, floating in the wake of a falling sunbeam. It was Miss Searle, and the sunbeam transformed her "ling long" yellow hair into a sort of aureola about her head. Could this be the young lady who had just been playing "tag" in the orchard? Had she romped in that fleecy gown with its delicate lace trimmings? or had she made a new toilet with the magic speed of a Cinderella? Her uncle's knitted brows cleared as he arose to greet her and present her with formal pride to "the son of my old friend Judge Kirke." She extended her hand with a playful smile.

"I am happy to meet you again, Mr. Kirke, and without that dreadful baby."

He had risen rather stiffly, expecting an icy greeting; but it seemed that Miss Searle made a distinction between chance acquaintances and people who came with proper credentials. This was her court, here she was queen; and it pleased her to be sweetly gracious and charming.

"Thank you. I am very happy to be permitted to call and inquire if you have recovered from the fatigue of the journey. Was that a human baby, Miss Searle?"

Upon this they both laughed; and she said, turning to Mr. Searle,—

"You wouldn't wonder at the question, uncle Mel-
len, if you had seen the impish cruelty of that little creature, and its fierce way of pulling his hair. — I owe you a debt of gratitude, Mr. Kirke, for thrusting your head into the breach."

She paused as a dark figure entered the doorway like the shadow of night; and the young man said to himself, "'Who is this that cometh from the house of mourning, clad in the garments of woe?'"

"My friend Miss Wilder, Mr. Kirke."

Her appearance was striking, — almost severe. There were few curves of beauty in her erect, square-shouldered figure, no compromising waves in her midnight hair; but when she smiled, as now, a light leaped out of her dark eyes as warm and friendly as a household fire.

"Miss Wilder, this is the Good Samaritan who helped me the other day with little Mamie. You ought

to have been there to make a sketch of him as he strode frantically up and down the aisle, brandishing her on his shoulder."

"I think I should have sketched that baby with a very hard pencil," said Miss Wilder, shaking hands warmly. "Even its grandmother is half beside herself with such a child."

Rosa now appeared, and lighted the hanging-lamps, which the moonlight put to shame with a cold, superior smile.

"Rosa, will you bring a pitcher of water fresh from the pump?" asked Mr. Searle blandly. "Mr. Kirke, I wish to regale you with some sparkling water from an old well which has come down to our family by inheritance, like the wells of the Israelites," he added, as the nut-brown maid re-appeared with pitcher and glasses.

The water was very refreshing; and the young man declared he would like to drink a health to the roan-tree which Mr. Searle said grew beside it, and had the power of keeping off witches.

The little French girl listened with much interest to these remarks. She had never felt quite sure before that there are such beings as witches, but she should believe it henceforth on what she considered the highest authority. She wore a charm about her neck, the hind foot of a rabbit, which her lover Peter had shot in the graveyard at midnight; and she had fancied once or twice that Miss Date was disposed to make game of this "graveyard rabbit," for she did make game sometimes without smiling at all. Miss Evelyn never did such a thing: she was so very, very tender of people's feelings. It seemed rather too bad, but

Miss Date called attention now to this charm; and Rosa was sure the large young gentleman understood at once how affairs stood between herself and Peter. She retreated to the kitchen in great confusion, with pitcher and goblet; and next moment there was heard a crash of glass, followed by a diminutive scream.

"I am afraid, Theodate, what you said was rather embarrassing to the child," remarked Mr. Searle. "She seems to be as sensitive as Peter himself."

And then, for the amusement of the company, he told an anecdote of this French youth, his work-boy.

"When he filled our wood-box this morning, he wanted to put on his leather apron; but his hat was on his head, and how to get the apron over the hat he could not think. But he finally solved the problem by taking off the hat and slipping it through the apron."

Poor love-distraught Peter! It was very easy to laugh at his aberration of mind; it served to give a light and pleasant turn to the conversation. And, when Mr. Searle saw that the young people were chatting together in the highest good-humor, he soon excused himself and took his leave; turning at the door to say in a softened tone to his niece, "Your aunt wants to see you, Evelyn. Come down to-morrow if you can."

This lowering of the voice had been noticeable whenever he addressed her. Was it an involuntary tribute to her gentle-heartedness?

She had a sunny face. There was a slight uplifting of the nose, as if it breathed the upper ether; a glad look in the eyes, as if they saw the silver lining of the clouds; a pleasant look about the mouth, as if it shut in a whole treasury of smiles. You felt that

she would look for the poetry of life, and find it. She would not sink into the pitfalls, for she bore wings on her feet. And how much sunshine these happy women garner up, and kindly shed abroad on rainy days!

These were Mr. Kirke's reflections, not mine. He understood now, for her uncle had told him so, that Miss Searle had a very buoyant temperament, but the loss of her mother had changed her sadly during the past year. How she could rely on Miss Wilder to keep up her spirits, as Mr. Searle said she did, was a mystery to Mr. Kirke: Miss Wilder seemed to him at first sight so very serious. What possessed a woman of her age to dress like a nun? Had she lost all her friends? She served as a foil to Miss Searle's fair beauty. Was there design of that sort in her sombre dress, with only the slight relief of a linen collar and a pansy at the throat? Even the pansy might be said to be in second mourning, for it had a heart of royal purple. Could she not bend to fashion enough to curl or toss or crimp her puritanical straight hair?

So much for masculine criticism. Miss Wilder had tried the effect of crimps and curls, and considered them as much out of place on her Roman forehead as a Punch and Judy in a pulpit. She *had* lost all her friends except Miss Searle. Moreover, black was economical, and she believed it becoming. She was as scrupulously neat in her attire as her friend; but Evelyn's little graceful touches of the toilet, she abjured. What had a plain woman to do with adornments? Evelyn believed she had possibilities of beauty, and wished she felt half the interest in bringing out her own best points that she had in painting from

nature. But Theodate had settled the matter long ago, and it was not to be denied that her rigid simplicity of dress did give her extra time for work.

"Miss Searle," said Mr. Kirke, "we met a very discouraged little boy going out of your garden, overpowered with rhubarb stalks. He looked like Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane."

"Jimmy Skillings, I presume, though I did not know he had been here."

"He will carry off the whole garden, Evelyn, if you are so easy with him," exclaimed Miss Wilder. "The Skillingses are a poor family in the village," she explained to Mr. Kirke, "always begging or borrowing; vegetables, clothes-lines, — even stove-pipes they ask for. I never knew Jimmy to return but one borrowed article, and that was an egg; and I was so surprised that I said, 'Why, Jimmy, is that the egg I lent you the other day?' — 'No,' said he, 'mother used that egg: this is another one.'"

Miss Wilder was a good talker; and Miss Searle led her on to relate several stories, evidently amused herself, and sure that Mr. Kirke would be amused, by her dryly uttered drolleries.

Schoolmates these two young women had been a few years ago at Wellesley, — merely schoolmates at first, then friends; and now they were more than friends, united by a bond which they held almost as sacred as marriage. This was another thing Mr. Searle had told Mr. Kirke; and the young man considered it romantic, and wondered what would be the end of it, in case either of the twain should venture to think of matrimony.

"What enviable people you are," said, he "living quite above the world, in the loveliest spot this side of sundown, — unless you find it too quiet?"

"Quiet! That is the very thing Miss Searle is looking for, and can never find. She sends me away every morning, imploring me to stay away all day, just to give her a little quiet; and when I come back at night, half afraid to meet her, she says, 'Why, what brought you home so soon?'"

Miss Searle smiled up at Mr. Kirke. "In plain prose, Miss Wilder has classes in painting which take all her mornings, and she often sketches in the afternoon, which leaves me alone more than I would choose. But we always have our evenings together," she added with a look which said that that was bliss enough for this world.

"Mr. Kirke, are you waiting to be asked the question, how do you like Narransauc?" said Miss Wilder.

"Oh, that is superfluous! I'm captivated. How can I help it?"

"Thank you, thank you. I like that," said Miss Wilder, leaving her place on the sofa and taking a chair somewhat nearer their guest. For all her serious looks and slowness of speech, she was humorous, he could see that, and more impulsive than the lighter, sunnier Miss Searle.

"I enjoy the views immensely, Miss Wilder, from various points, above all from this hill. Will you mind my bringing up my camera some fine morning? You shall not be disturbed in the least."

"Your camera?"

"Yes. Perhaps Mr. Searle did not mention to you that I am a travelling photographer."

Miss Wilder looked amazed.

"No, he did not." She hesitated a moment. "Now, perhaps that will be the very thing for me. If you could take some of the views I like, and I could send them to my friends" —

"Don't you see he's laughing at us, dear?" interposed Miss Searle with a quiet smile. "I'm afraid he's only a Chicago lawyer, and not an artist. At any rate, I have his card that says so."

Indeed! Then she had not deliberately lost the card, after all.

Miss Wilder laughed heartily at her mistake; she had an infectious laugh.

"But you did bring a camera?" she asked. "You won't be so cruel as to say you were jesting about that?"

"Yes, I did bring a camera for my own amusement; but my pictures would strike despair to your heart, Miss Wilder: you never saw any thing so bad."

"Oh, perhaps, now, you are too modest! You'll let us see some and judge for ourselves, won't you?"

After this the conversation naturally drifted to art. Mr. Kirke had a taste for it, and had gathered considerable desultory information on the subject, besides being acquainted with several well-known artists; and the talk grew quite animated, Miss Searle joining in it chiefly with her eyes. She was such an electric listener that Mr. Kirke was surprised afterward to remember how little she had really said.

During a pause she brought him a photograph-album;

but he was so interested in the graceful way she turned the leaves, and the vital force of her manner in giving bits of biography, that he sometimes forgot to look at the pictures, for looking at her.

"There, this is a Chinaman; perhaps you wouldn't care to hear his history. But it reminds me to ask, do the Chinese identify criminals by taking an impression of their thumbs?"

"I have heard so."

"That is convenient and sensible, just like the Chinese," remarked Miss Wilder. "There never were two thumbs alike, of course."

"Neither are hands alike. I wish I had a book full of the hands of my intimate friends, all done to the life," said Miss Searle. "They are just as individual as faces, and just as full of character."

She was turning a leaf as she spoke; and Mr. Kirke suddenly exclaimed, "Joe Fiske! Why, where did you ever know him?"

"*Bryant* Fiske is a friend of ours from Chicago," replied Miss Searle briefly, and was about to turn another leaf; but Mr. Kirke persisted, —

"Joseph Bryant Fiske is his full name, one of our neighbors at home; but I never dreamed of his knowing *you*."

Miss Wilder came forward now from the sofa, and laid on the table a geranium-leaf which she had been crushing in her hand. "Mr. Fiske has been at Cambridge University; and Miss Searle and I have known him well, for we spend our winters in Boston."

"Ah! I wonder I never heard of it."

"And Mr. Fiske was here last summer for several

weeks," added Miss Wilder, "and again for a few days in May."

"You surprise me more and more. Spent several weeks at Narransauc, and never mentioned it to me!"

At this moment, Mr. Kirke chanced to meet Miss Searle's eyes, which dropped timidly. She left her chair to adjust the lamp, which required no attention; and it flashed through his mind, — he could hardly have told why, — that she did not choose to talk of Mr. Fiske, that she had not wished his name brought up. And why not? What was amiss in Joe Fiske? He could not be her lover? Then another blaze of intuition, — the name "B. I. Kirke" on that letter: could it possibly have been meant for "B. J. Fiske"? Strange it had not occurred to him long ago. Yet not so strange either, considering that he had never before seen Joe's initials reversed in that order. They had always been "J. B. F.," as they should be. This freak of turning them topsy-turvy, and calling himself Bryant, was new to Mr. Kirke. And there was the "K:" could that have done duty as an "F"? Improbable. The whole surmise was absurd, especially Joe's love-affair. Yet why otherwise had Joe been so sly about his visit to Narransauc? So moody and restless, too, all the spring, even more trying to the patience than usual. It was a subject for reflection.

Mr. Kirke shortened his call, already long for village etiquette, and tore himself away while yet it seemed to him that the delightful evening was only begun.

"I hope you will remain in town some time," said Miss Wilder in a friendly tone, at the door; and Miss Searle's large gray eyes held a wish equally kind.

“Thank you. I shall probably stay several weeks,” was the prompt reply, though nothing had been farther from his plans an hour ago. A few days would amply suffice, he had thought, and then for the Adirondacks. But that was before he had seen the view from Violet Hill.

VI.

"All her excellences stand in her so silently, as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge."

SIR THOMAS OVERBURY.

"NOW for that vagrant letter," said Mr. Kirke, taking it out as soon as he reached his room at the Druid, and reading the superscription with perfect ease: "B. J. Fiske." It was like racking one's brains over a hard line in Virgil, and then suddenly spying a footnote at the bottom of the page, which lets in a light as clear as noon-day. He stamped his foot with impatience.

"I might have made it out by my own unassisted imagination if I had ever heard of his being at Nar-ransauc, the insufferable idiot! And he aspired to that girl! A boy just out of college; no father, a mother and sister to support; and falling in love out of hand! I never thought he was quite level-headed, but this is too much. Well, he is Art's brother, and I mustn't be hard on the child," with a smile at his juvenile absurdity.

"I can understand now the surprise in her letter. She had been kind to him, as she was to me this evening, or as she was to that little wight with the rhubarb; and he took it for 'encouragement.' It will always be a mystery to her, I suppose, how it should have hap-

pened; for she certainly has no more artifice than a white kitten. Now, there's the wonder of it, after all," reflected Mr. Kirke, who was nothing if not metaphysical. "Artifice would explain it; but she is an amber and white woman, innocent of all design, and not in the least fascinating. If either of them could cast a glamour, I'd sooner suspect Miss Wilder with those midnight eyes of hers; and I fancy I'm entitled to an opinion, being a moderately susceptible young man, of some experience in affairs of the heart. I should have the sincerest respect and admiration for Miss Searle, — by the way, she doesn't look a day over twenty, — she's as graceful as wild oats, and you like to watch her ways, like those of a child: but she's too transparent to be dangerous; it needs a spice of wickedness to bewitch a man, and that's always lacking in your ethereal women. My dear Miss Searle, I kneel to your transcendent loveliness, but my heart is safe against your charms.

"Well, well," with a look of scorn tempered by pity, "Joe's mind is in a wild state; and I'm sorry for the poor girl if he means to pursue the subject, as he certainly will unless he hears from her. Can he have waited all this while for her answer? Highly improbable. Still he ought to have the letter. I believe I'll remail it forthwith."

He found a fresh envelope, and dipped his pen in the ink. "Stay, he'll recognize my writing. He'll see I'm in Narransauc, and will suspect I'm intruding upon his affairs. No, I'll destroy the letter, and then it will tell no tales."

He was about to tear it across, when the thought occurred to him, "Suppose the boy should tire of wait-

ing, and in a frenzy of desperation come on here to demand his sentence from Miss Searle's own lips?"

The bare possibility was startling; it decided him at once. "No; in justice to the young lady, I must send the letter. Can I disguise my hand?—Here's a feminine stroke that I flatter myself is well done," he added triumphantly, after several trials. "It's positively a little like Miss Searle's; at any rate, more like hers than like my own. He'll study over it, and wonder where the letter has waited so long, but will never suspect me of having tampered with it. Why should he, when it is certainly not my writing? Moreover, he does not know I'm in Narransauc, and I must take care that he does not find it out."

He would see that the letter was mailed early in the morning when he went to escort Miss Belcher of Boston to the train. She was a highly respectable, withered little person, who had made about as much impression upon him as a faded autumn leaf. But there was enough chivalry in Benjamin Kirke, indolent as he was, to insure his rising betimes to-morrow morning to bid her a courteous good-by.

"Do you remain much longer, Mr. Kirke?" asked the lady, as he made his parting bow at the car-window.

"As long as the charm holds," he replied. "The town is very green and beautiful."

"So are some cemeteries," she answered with a final wave of the hand, and a satirical smile.

Well, it might be a trifle dull; but it was a sweet, refined dulness, and thus far he was quite content. He was glad the letter was gone, and wished he might

tell Miss Searle the history of it. It would surely amaze her to learn that this product of her brain had had such a wide circulation, travelling farther, perhaps, than some of her stories. He thought he should like to read her stories: they must be pure and wholesome. If she had a pen-name, what was it, he wondered, and had she more than a local reputation? He would like to see Miss Wilder's paintings. She looked the sort of person to do a thing well: she would be just and conscientious in all she undertook.

He had risen at such an unwonted hour that he had a long day on his hands, and it promised to be a sultry one. How should he entertain himself? He might take a few photographs. Yes, that was just the thing. Would Tom go with him, he wondered, and help carry the burdensome materials? Certainly he would. Tom had conceived a prodigious fancy for the "big fellow from Chicago," and liked nothing better than rambling off with him to the Cascade in a broiling sun, encumbered by instrument and chemicals.

Mr. Kirke took several views, and spent most of the afternoon in elaborating two of them, which turned out to be darker and gloomier than the views of a pessimist. Tom was aware of a great strain upon his conscience when he tried to praise them.

"The most that ails 'em is the black spatters," said he hesitatingly. "There wasn't any ink in any of them bottles, was there?"

The landlord's comments were in the same vein. "Like enough they'd be first-rate, if they weren't mildewed," he said, as anxious as Tom to be polite, and equally afraid of sacrificing the truth.

The amateur artist was divided between scornful contempt of his own work, and amusement at these free criticisms.

"I believe I'll show them to Miss Wilder, just for the fun of the thing. Will it do to call this evening? I'm afraid not."

Yet when he went out for a stroll after tea, he was careful to place the pictures in his pocket. It was doubtful when Miss Wilder would see them, but it was well to have them with him. He owed it to her, he thought, to ask her what were her favorite bits of landscape; and it might be polite even to offer her the camera, and instruct her how to use it. He would be glad to help her in this way, if she would not laugh at him.

Mr. Simpson was close at his heels as he left the house.

"Better come out on the bridge, and see the river-drivers, Mr. Kirke."

The bridge was so near the hotel that the landlord seemed to regard it as a sort of annex, and spent much of his leisure time standing on it, looking down into the water. Mr. Kirke joined him now; and in company with a score of other people, old and young, they leaned over the bridge-railing to watch the men in gray, known as "river-drivers," who were setting loose a "jam of logs."

"It's a dreadful late season and low water, or the logs would have been down before," said Mr. Simpson, as if the delinquencies of Nature ought to be excused to a stranger.

"This is all new to me. Why, it's like a huge game of jack-straws," exclaimed Mr. Kirke.

The logs were pressed closely together, forming a sizable island six feet high, technically a "jam," on which stood thirty men with long hooked poles, detaching one log after another from the irregular mass, to send it whirling after its fellows.

"So it is; yes. I used to play 'em when I was a youngster," replied Mr. Simpson after a long interval, during which Mr. Kirke had forgotten his allusion to jack-straws, and was left to wonder vaguely what the man was talking about.

"Used to be as pretty again when they all wore red shirts. You ought to have seen 'em thirty years ago, decked out in red, and you'd have said it was a handsome spectacle. — Why, Theodate, is that you?"

"Good-evening, Mr. Simpson; good-evening, Mr. Kirke," replied Miss Wilder, setting down a good-sized flat package, and leaning over the railing to watch the busy crew.

"Isn't that fine now?" said Mr. Kirke, longing to expend some of his surplus muscle in wielding one of the cant-dogs. "Would they let me go down there and lend a hand, do you think, Mr. Simpson?"

"No, they'd only laugh at you," replied the landlord slowly, casting a pitying eye on the youth's faultless linen and the gimcracks he wore for sleeve-buttons. "You were cut out for a regular Samson, but you see you've been spoiled in the bringing up. It may look easy to you, what they're doing, but 'twould keel you up in half an hour."

The patronizing tone rather nettled Ben Kirke, the champion rower and polo-player, who felt that he had it in him to throw any one of the stalwart river-drivers

on the jam ; but he chose to ignore this slighting remark.

"Do you understand the game, Miss Wilder?" he asked, as the ejaculations of the men, short and earnest, rose on the air: "Hello! Heave there! Now for it!"

"No, I'm not initiated. I only know it takes a certain amount of shouting as well as prying to start the logs."

"No, there's a science to it," said the landlord. "You see, there's one particular log they're aiming for, the one that holds the jam. There's always one log that does the business."

"Like the key-stone of an arch," exclaimed Miss Wilder.

"Well, yes. They call it the *key-log*; and, when they're smart enough to get hold of that and pry it up, the jam breaks, and off goes the whole caboodle of 'em. Now, you hold on a while," pursued Mr. Simpson, taking off his hat and wiping his excited crown. "You just hold on a little while. I think it's a doubt if they get it off to-night; but, if they do, it's worth staying for, ain't it, Theodate?"

"Yes," she replied, pushing back her shade-hat to insure a clearer view; whereupon a hairpin stole out, and down fell a heavy mass of purple-black hair, sweeping her shoulders and shimmering in the sun. She caught up the recreant coil, and carelessly put it back in place, thinking of Lizzie Hexam and of the trial it was to make straight hair stay up. She would have been surprised if she had known that Mr. Kirke was regarding her with admiration.

"What hair and eyes! She just escapes being a magnificent woman."

She was looking intently at the log-drivers, her head bent a little forward, her hands clasping the railing. Well-shaped hands they were, rather small for her size, but very brown from exposure to the sun; for she sketched every afternoon out of doors, and, of course, without gloves.

"Regarding her in the light of a piece of furniture, you'd call her Eastlake. Regarding her as a piece of architecture, you'd call her Gothic. Why doesn't she decorate herself?" thought Mr. Kirke, and resumed his watch of the logs. It was an exciting moment. "Hurrah! 'rah! 'rah!" The banks took up the echo. Off went every man's hat, and up it flew in air, including the disinterested hats of the men on the bridge. The secret was out, the key found, the prison unlocked, the captives at large. "Hurrah! hurrah!" The merry giants were certainly alive, and quivering with delight at their recovered freedom. It was impossible not to rejoice with them, as they made triumphant curvets to try their powers. North, south, east, and west they turned, before launching eastward at last down the watery highway toward the sea.

"Was it worth staying for, Mr. Kirke?" asked Miss Wilder.

"I would have waited all night for a sight like that," said the young man, drawing in his breath, as the last loitering logs were caught up in the hurrying current and disappeared below the bridge.

"See what an excitement they leave in the water," said Miss Wilder. "That wild, free motion is the

despair of an artist; it is forever eluding him and dying on the point of his brush. O Mr. Kirke, what of the camera? Have you taken any pictures?"

"Two. May I show them to you?" feeling in his breast-pocket. "But no, I hardly dare; they are really too appalling."

"But I enjoy being frightened. Let me see them, please."

"At your own risk, Miss Wilder, — if you'll allow me to walk home with you and carry that parcel."

"Certainly. Then Miss Searle will share the pleasure of seeing your pictures."

As they walked off the bridge, Mr. Kirke feeling that he had scored several points at one stroke, Mr. Simpson wiped his head leisurely, and looked after them, saying to a bystander, —

"That's as fine a young fellow as I ever saw in this town, and I've lived here over seventy-five years. But it's a pity he hadn't some regular trade, so he wouldn't go fooling round in the daguerreotype business. It looks to me as if he had bit off more'n he can chew."

They passed the hotel piazza, where two men were seated playing a serious game of checkers. Next door was the shop of Seth Cromwell, "Tin-plate and sheet-iron worker," father of Andrew; and opposite was a comprehensive variety store, with a stunted tree close by it, writhing under the ignoble legend, "Good Family Butter." Next the store was a large post-office, which included a town-library and reading-room. The church was farther on up the hill, surrounded by an open space which served as a sort of village green.

"Those church-windows are obliged to wink at a

good deal of secular conduct," said Miss Wilder, as they passed a crowd of boys playing ball. One of the boys, seeing her, caught up a battered tin pail which had been reposing on the church-steps, and ran to meet her, swinging it in his hands.

"Say, want any plums? Picked 'em this afternoon," whipping off a piece of newspaper, and revealing a moist substance resembling raspberry jam, reeking with purple juice.

"Why, Jimmy, what is it? No, of course I don't want *that!*"

The boy's freckled face deepened to orange color, as he sulkily replaced the newspaper, glowered at Mr. Kirke, and ran back to his game.

"The rhubarb boy? I hardly knew him without the foliage."

"Yes; but why did I crush him in that way?" exclaimed Miss Wilder in compunctious tones, thinking how sweetly Evelyn would have declined the dreadful plums, and sent him off smiling.

"You haven't crushed him. You couldn't do it with a mangle," said Mr. Kirke, as Jimmy ran forward chasing the ball with shouts of laughter, leaving the forgotten "plums" drowning still deeper in their heart's gore.

All the way up the hill the path was bordered on the right by elms and maples, whose boles reached to a magnificent girth and made great stretches of shadow upon the soft grass below. A row of cinnamon-rose bushes by the corner of an old fence scattered glowing petals wastefully at Mr. Kirke's feet as he brushed by them. And now they both paused a moment, for they had a

good outlook here upon the river, fringed with beeches, willows, oilnuts, and those most graceful of all small trees, tender white birches. Neither of them spoke, and no sound arose louder than their own breaths; but soon a faint and gradually increasing noise murdered the sweet silence. It was the exasperating creak of Mr. Crabtree's cart-wheels struggling up the hill.

"Good-evening, is that you?" he called out, in tones loud enough to speak a ship in a storm. "Wait a minute."

He had come to a full halt now on the steepest point of the hill, to the manifest inconvenience of his meekly surprised horse. "Wait a minute. Did you hear of the scare they had last night up to the Putnams', about burglars?"

"No, oh, no!" cried Theodate, her eyes bright with terror.

"Oh, don't be scared now! Only, your silver—where are you in the habit of keeping of it?"

"In the sideboard,—what's not on the table."

"Why don't you set it out on the front-door stone?" rejoined Mr. Crabtree playfully. "Now, don't you worry a minute about them burglars, Theodate. I don't know's there's any truth in it, but my wife was of the opinion I'd better name it to you.—Giddap!" And, leaving the thorn to rankle as it might, the obliging neighbor rode away in triumph.

"What unmitigated nonsense! I don't believe a word of it," said Mr. Kirke, turning to his companion, who stood perfectly still, bent forward, her face quite colorless, and her breath coming with difficulty. "Take my arm, Miss Wilder. Lean on me."

"Thank you. I am — better now," said she with a quiver of the mouth, that tried hard to be a smile. "I am not frightened to death, Mr. Kirke; it was only the — suddenness. I have slight attacks of palpitation of the heart — sometimes." And she erected herself and walked slowly on. "You see now why I stooped forward and dropped my arms? It arrests the palpitation."

"Yes, I understand," said he gravely.

Her face was still very pale.

"But don't think again of that foolish story. I will patrol your grounds all night, if it will relieve your mind. I will, indeed."

"Thank you; but really I am not a coward. Do not misapprehend me," said she, laughing bravely. "I will confide to you, Mr. Kirke, that I own a pistol, and can fire it, too, if occasion should require."

"Is it possible?"

"Oh, you are not to imagine I am of a murderous disposition and wear it at my side. But Mr. Fiske, your friend, persuaded me that it was well to learn to fire at a mark; and I have practised a little."

"Bravo!" said Mr. Kirke. He was keeping step with Miss Wilder, but did not venture to offer his arm again. "It seems that you know Mr. Fiske well?"

"Oh, yes! He is an enchanting young man, — gay, and full of anecdote. But did you ever know him still for a minute?" She smiled as she spoke, drawing a mental comparison, perhaps, between the youth in perpetual motion and this athletic, easy-going giant by her side.

"No, never," responded Mr. Kirke, thinking the

erratic, uncertain Joe must have been on his best behavior at Narransauc; for surely he was not in general considered "enchanted." "The boy has a bright, quick mind," he continued heartily. "His older brother was a particular friend of mine, my chum at college."

"Arthur, the one who died? We have heard much about him. Was he really so superior?"

"I thought so. He had a remarkable influence over his friends. His brother needed him; and it would have made all the difference in the world to Joe, if he had lived."

"Now, do you know I can easily believe that? Bryant—or Joe as you call him—is a brilliant, versatile fellow, rather inclined to look up to people older than himself; is it not so?"

Mr. Kirke could hardly forbear smiling at the innocent art of the question. Naturally Joe had looked up to these two young ladies; that went without the saying.

"Yes, he is amenable to advice from people he esteems; not from every one, though." And he thought of the boy's poor mother, a childish woman, who called Joe hard-headed, and bemoaned to all the world her lack of influence over him.

"Mr. Fiske was at Harvard all last winter, you know, as well as the winter before; and we were in Boston, and he came out regularly to spend two evenings a week with us."

"Ah! Then you ought to feel well acquainted with him."

"Oh, yes! And he was here a long time last sum-

mer, certainly a month. He is very old for his years, very manly. Don't you think he has unusual tenacity of purpose; or am I mistaken?" she added, without any apparent reason for the question. "That is, he would not be easily turned from a cherished plan—well, an idea?"

"Why not ask it outright: will he be constant in love, and so a trial to Miss Searle?" thought Mr. Kirke, much amused; though he managed to answer demurely, "I hardly know, he is still so young."

But they were on the piazza now. Miss Searle was coming toward them with a smile of greeting, and the tall clock on the stairs striking eight put a summary end to the conversation.

VII.

*"Happy are they that hear their detractions,
And can put them to mending."*

SHAKESPEARE'S *Much Ado*.

THE days glided on very quietly for Mr. Kirke. He received pleasant hospitalities from Mr. Searle's family, had bookish chats with young Mr. Marsh, the clergyman, walked, fished, bicycled; and, above all, paid daily visits to Violet Hill. It was not an exciting mode of pleasure-seeking; but he liked the air of the town, so he told his landlady, who replied delightedly, that it was always so with strangers, with the single exception of "that lady from Boston." People who came to Narransauc were sure to stay on, she said. The middle of July was usually the time to look for them, and that would soon be here.

A new awning of blue-checked goods, notched at the edges and bound with scarlet, floated now from the upper piazza. A servant-girl appeared in the kitchen; and Mr. Simpson began to hint mysteriously of "parties" from Portland and from Lynn who wished to engage rooms, and Tom was charged to give the "span" an extra grooming in view of coming demands. This span presented the pleasing contrast of a large white horse and a small black nag, and drew a carryall which seated four souls. "For example, the young ladies,

Cousin Ozro Searle, and myself," thought Mr. Kirke, surveying it one day in an observant mood.

Oak Hill was three miles away, the point of view Miss Wilder desired to put on canvas. He took no pride in his blunders with the camera, but the hope of helping her to the ground-idea of a new picture gave him a glow of purely benevolent pleasure. Why should he not go to see the young ladies, and ask them if they would like a ride some day to Oak Hill? It was one of the fairest of summer evenings, and Narransauc was largely out of doors enjoying it. The girls and boys from the two coat-shops were at leisure, the noisy brass band was parading the street, and altogether the town presented a festive appearance which would have surprised Miss Belcher of Boston. As the band tramped by the hotel, the crimson roses growing luxuriantly on the eastern side dropped their petals in showers, but the two men seated as usual on the piazza at checkers never even looked up from their game. Seth Cromwell, the "sheet-iron and tin worker," was taking down his samples of tin ware; and the rays of the setting sun, illumining the big coffee-pot, struck a blaze of reflected light into Mr. Kirke's eyes as he passed by the door.

On his way half up the long hill, he overtook Rosa and Peter. Rosa called after him, and when he stopped seemed frightened at what she had done.

"I didn't think," said she; "I mean I thought— Was you going up to see the young ladies?"

"Is there any thing I can do for you, Rosa?" he asked, smiling; while handsome Peter smiled too at her incoherence.

She was evidently taking home the night's mail from the post-office, for both hands were burdened with letters.

"I don't know as Miss Wilder" — he observed she did not say Miss Searle — "would like it;" and then she held out the letters. "But if it wouldn't be no trouble" —

"Certainly, I will take them for you with pleasure," said Mr. Kirke. "I suppose you and Peter want to go down and hear the band play."

It was a little thing, and he was glad to oblige the interesting pair; but, in glancing carelessly at the letters, he could not help seeing that one of them was from Joseph Fiske, no doubt in reply to the wandering epistle which must have reached him at last.

"Sorry to have to give it to her," he thought. "I wonder where this thing is going to end."

He found both the young ladies in the garden at the rear of the house; Miss Searle wielding a pair of scissors, Miss Wilder a trowel, while Cousin Ozro knelt before them planting some sort of a vine. They greeted Mr. Kirke very cordially. "So you have turned knight-errant," said Miss Wilder, coming up to him in her dignified way, and holding out her free hand for the mail. Miss Searle approached with her usual "skipping grace," but flushed as she received and looked at her letters, and grasped at the syringa-tree with a nervous motion.

"Pray go into the summer-house, young ladies, and look over your mail," said Mr. Kirke. "I hope you are both very well."

"Miss Searle is not well; she is killing herself,"

replied Miss Wilder flatly. "What do you think of a young lady, Mr. Kirke, who writes six hours in the morning at the top of her bent, and teaches a charity school in the afternoon in weather like this?"

"What do I think of her? I think she is too good for this world, and is trying to fly out of it."

"Now listen to me," retorted Miss Searle, waving a gesture toward Miss Wilder. "What do you think of a young lady, Mr. Kirke, who teaches painting every morning with might and main, and goes sketching every afternoon in weather like this?"

"Go along into the summer-house, girls," cried out Ozro. "Mr. Kirke and I would like a little peace, and you are always quarrelling.—I am planting a matrimony vine," he added, as they disappeared; "and it makes me feel as I do when I make an offer of marriage, and don't know whether it will be accepted or not."

Ozro was a would-be wit of eighteen, with "seedling brains," which would perhaps amount to something in time, if his friends only had the patience to wait for them to grow.

"Isn't this a scarecrow of a garden, though? Oh, you needn't say any thing! I know what you think."

The garden was by no means of the regulation pattern, but just an exuberant tangle of pleasant surprises; here a syringa-tree, there a row of currant-bushes; in this corner a gray rock overgrown with creeping moneywort and moss; in a southern nook a mound with a trellis hidden by grape-leaves; and under a weeping-willow, that had no business there, a brown summer-house in the shape of a Swiss *châlet*.

“Mr. Kirke, you are obliged to admire this garden,” said Ozro, rising from his knees. “You mustn’t say it looks helter-skelter. It’s only picturesque. You see the girls mix it up this way on purpose,” which was literally true. They had “mixed” it carefully; and, though Nature seemed to run riot, she had been sternly checked and pruned, till you would look in vain for a recreant weed or broken stem in all the lush profusion.

Miss Wilder had not finished reading her letters; but Miss Searle came out of the *chalet*, and said to Mr. Kirke with a hospitable smile, —

“This is like a walk into the country, isn’t it? Come with me. I am going to cut some flowers for Ozro to take down to the Temperance Hall. We’ll begin with the plebeian ones.”

She led the way to the fence-border, where stood sundry thistles with needles in their sides, and tall sunflowers, which she said, laughingly, had striven so hard to follow the sun, that they had brought on curvature of the spine. “I love sunflowers. They are found from Maine to Arizona, indifferent to change of climate, so long as their sun-god is only in sight. — Do you want some of the straightest of these, for the Egyptian vase, Ozro?” Next she was bending over a little plat of daisies, which she said were from the grave of Burns; but they looked too fair and frail to be disturbed, and she passed on in a zigzag course to the rose-bushes, plucking one of each variety till both her hands were full. “There, I can’t spare any more roses, Ozro, but you may have any thing else you can find; and I’ll lend you the large fountain vase, if you like. — Shall we go into the house now, Mr. Kirke?”

Her letter from Mr. Fiske had disturbed her greatly. It was the third on the same subject, full of a fierce despair; though the despair was conditional, and he would delay going into sackcloth till he heard from her again. He knew she would change her mind.

"How many times must I go through all this?" she mused, the thin smile of hospitality gradually disappearing, and revealing a sad mouth with a droop at the corners. She did not perceive that Mr. Kirke was looking at her, or suspect that he held the key to her thoughts.

"Shall we sit here on the piazza, Mr. Kirke?"

There were rustic chairs there, and a lounge. She took one of the chairs, and he chose a lower place on one of the piazza steps. They sat a while in silence, looking at the westering sun, and noting the shadows cast by the trees and houses far below them in the village.

"What is the most interesting part of that landscape to you?" said Miss Searle at last.

"The place where the sky and earth meet, by all means."

"That is just what I think," she rejoined; "not the sky alone or the earth alone, but the horizon. Why is it, I wonder?"

"Because we are mortal," said Mr. Kirke promptly, "and the sky is too vague for us unless it touches the earth somewhere."

"Is that it?"

"I believe so; just as a sermon must have some human nature in it, or it does not move us. Now, that's the fault of your good preacher, Mr. Marsh, if

you'll pardon me. When he goes into the pulpit, he leaves the earth behind him; and we strain our eyes to find a horizon line somewhere, but can't, and then we get lost in the blue."

Miss Searle laughed. "He is very abstracted and vague, I admit; but, then, he is very young. When he has a little more knowledge of the world, he can meet our wants better."

"Is it not the same thing with writing?" asked Mr. Kirke, wishing to divert her thoughts. "I fancy you cannot touch the popular heart unless you mingle with various sorts of people, and make a study of human nature?"

"Very true. The secret of writing is the capacity to feel, and to make others feel. It is magnetism on the point of a pen."

Mr. Kirke looked up with an appreciative smile. He thought this was well said.

"Not that I have this power myself," added Miss Searle modestly. "I can only discern what it is, and long for it. I am no genius."

Mr. Kirke did not know how far she might undervalue herself; yet, with or without genius, he was aware that she had earned the money to give her younger brother a liberal education, and to supply the wants of her mother's declining years, — she, a frail girl, as gentle and retiring in manner as his sister Lucy. But there was something in her eyes that Lucy never had. They were eyes that dared all things, and hoped all things. They were eyes that looked beyond this world, and penetrated the veil of the invisible. He felt a thrill of admiration for her, amounting to reverence; an admi-

ration he would not have expressed even if he could. He contrasted her busy, full life with Kate Stanley's pursuit of the new fashions, and his lip curled. He contrasted it with his own aimless existence, and had the grace to blush for himself.

"I wonder if it is desirable to have genius," said he, breaking the pause with the first words that occurred to him.

"Oh, dear, no! I should shrink from the responsibility," she replied with a little shiver. "But it's all service, after all. I've found that out, Mr. Kirke: whether your gifts are great or small, they are to be used for others."

"Yes," said he vaguely. How much had he ever thought of this before?

"We affect others for good or ill, whether we mean it or not," she went on. "We can't live to ourselves any more than the leaves on a tree."

"Oh, no!"

His remarks were becoming rather brief, and perhaps it occurred to her that this was hardly the sort of conversation to interest a professed idler; for with ready tact she broke off, saying, "To go back to the sky, Mr. Kirke, I wonder who first called it blue. The ancients had no name for the color, I believe."

"No; they knew only red, yellow, and green. People had to become somewhat enlightened before blue was worked out. Perhaps you might call it rather a spiritual hue," said he with a smiling glance at her turquoise-colored dress, which made a fine setting, he thought, for her fair face.

"Blue is the rarest of all hues in flowers now,"

she rejoined, "and perhaps it always will be. Is it not strange, though, that colors should go on multiplying, and that they should follow the progress of ideas? What a wonderful world it will be when it is finished!"

"It is a wonderful world now," said he, in a tone of unwonted enthusiasm. The world—his world—lay all before him, waiting for him. Should he trifle longer, when the harvest was plenty and the laborers so few? "It is midsummer, and the hay is down," he said, his eyes travelling quickly over the distant meadows. "It is midsummer, and June is gone."

"Oh, never mind! I'm always glad when June is out of the way. It's too fairy-like, too wonderful to last; and I'm so on the alert not to lose one drop of its sweetness, that it's really quite fatiguing," said Miss Searle, letting her hands fall together with a playful gesture of weariness.

"June is almost too exquisite up here in New England," returned Mr. Kirke. "I've spent several springs in Cambridge, and isn't it a marvel to watch the unfolding of the leaves?"

"Oh, yes! Don't you fancy the trees are glad to reveal themselves in that quick, bright way, like poets who have had to keep their beautiful thoughts shut up in their hearts because the cold world would not listen, till all at once the world grows warm and genial, and they rush forth eager to confide in it? Am I talking nonsense?" she asked with a slightly embarrassed laugh, meeting his eye.

He always looked straight at her when she spoke; for she had so many beguiling little motions of the

eyes and eyebrows and the flexible mouth, that he missed something if he did not see as well as hear her speak.

But before he had time to assure her that she was talking the best of sense, and that it interested him immensely, a prosaic incident occurred, such as often disturbs the flow of poetic thought in the country. A disorderly woman, without any bonnet on her head, walked up to the piazza, and asked if she could borrow a piece of salt pork.

It was Jimmy Skillings's mother. She had "been *devilin'* all the afternoon in Miss Putnam's sullar," she said, "and nothing to show for it but a peck of white beans. She wished she was a washwoman; for a washwoman gits what she *gits*, and gits what she gits *give* her."

Mr. Kirke and Miss Searle exchanged smiles, and Rosa was summoned to explore the pork-barrel. After this Miss Wilder and Ozro came in from the garden, and it was time to propose the ride to Oak Hill. The young ladies were greatly obliged, but demurred a little. They were busy people, with little time to waste in roaming about under a hot sun; and, besides, the pictures were sure to be so very bad. However, it was settled at last that they would go, and Ozro with them, the day after to-morrow.

"Mr. Kirke," said Miss Wilder, as he was taking his leave, ridiculously early as he considered it, but he knew they were tired, "Mr. Kirke, can it be only two weeks that we have known you? You seem quite like an old acquaintance already."

"Yes, it was two weeks ago yesterday that I met Miss Searle on the train, and was introduced to her;

though I think she did not once look at me, — not fairly. I tried to make her, but she would not turn around."

"How could I?" said Miss Searle, a sensitive quiver running over her face at the recollection of the day's annoyances.

"There was no need of her looking at you. Evelyn can see through the back of her head," said Miss Wilder very seriously.

"Indeed!"

"You would think so, if you had heard the off-hand sketch she gave me that night of your appearance and character."

"My character; how surprising! Tell it, please."

"Now, Theodate!"

"Oh, never fear, Evelyn! It is safe with me."

"Really," said Mr. Kirke, "it won't be fair, Miss Wilder, if you don't go on, after exciting my curiosity in this way."

"Impossible," said she roguishly, "for the description was correct in every particular. Do you think it good manners to show people their own portraits?"

"I'd give a small fortune to know what she did say about me," queried the young man, bounding home with rapid strides through the leafy shadows. "What a charm she has, — a charm that grows on you, though not a dangerous one, as she does not know how to use it! And that's why I can't understand Joe Fiske's case. Joe Fiske! The insane presumption! But what could she have said about me?"

If he had known, how would the portrait have pleased him?

"A very large, indolent-looking young man, between

twenty-five and thirty ; much reserved force ; an inert, passive temperament. But temperament is deceptive, Theodate. Below his gentle, listless manner is an undercurrent of force that sweeps all before it when he chooses. A good mind : I gathered that from his chat with Mr. Crabtree ; though how cultivated, I cannot judge. A good heart certainly, or he wouldn't have allowed himself to be made ridiculous by that baby. He attracted me strongly, and at the same time he irritated me. I declare, Theodate, I felt like saying to him : ' Wake up, wake up. Life is short ; the world needs you.' And he has it in him to do so much, if he only will."

After all, it might have been well for Mr. Kirke if he had heard this off-hand sketch as it was given from the lips of Miss Searle.

VIII.

*"But who can tell what cause had that fair maid
To use him so, that lovèd her so well?
Or who with blame can justly her upbraid
For loving not; for who can love compel?"*

SPENSER.

"CONSIDER the lilies, O Evelyn, my dear, consider the lilies," pleaded Miss Wilder, as she entered the kitchen with head more than usually erect, and found Miss Searle standing patiently before the drop-table, teaching her amateur writing-class, — six vagrant boys and Rosa Dulac; while the Crabtree baby, who had come visiting, was begging in a little, high, squealing tone to be taken in arms. "Weren't you tired enough without this, Evelyn? Do go and rest."

"I told her so. I told her she ought to went and rested," said Rosa, looking up with the air of a culprit; for though ambitious to learn to write, because Peter knew how, she could not bear to have Miss Evelyn blamed for teaching her.

Not one of these boys could be wheedled into going to school; but they were all willing to spend an hour or half an hour in Miss Evelyn's society on certain afternoons of the week, lured by gingerbread or taffy such as is only to be found in "high families." If they got at the same time a little food for the mind, it was

certainly not their fault. It all came of Miss Evelyn's queer notions, and they tried to forgive her.

"Why, this is nothing, Theodate," said Miss Searle, taking up the clamorous baby. "I have finished my story, and married my heroine to the wrong man, and am so depressed over it that I must be diverted. — O Jimmy Skillings, *don't* wipe up the blots with your tongue."

"See here," said Jimmy, casting sheep's-eyes at Pat Murphy, "mayn't I quit now? Me and another boy, we want to go fishing."

This was rather an extra occasion. The whole class, to a man, had promised faithfully not to swear any more or use any bad words, "except Fourth of July," and evidently felt that this overpowering sacrifice deserved some sort of reward. Evelyn was a wise general: she knew her men.

"Yes, you may all stop writing. Wipe your pens, and put all your things neatly away in the shed. Rosa, you may get each of the boys a stick of your nice vinegar candy; and boys, you needn't come again till Monday. Now, don't forget to make a polite bow when you go out. That's right. Good-by, all."

"The whole thing is as easy for you as picking a flower; but what a piece of work I should make of it!" said Miss Wilder, looking on with a grim smile as Evelyn's uncouth adorers shuffled out respectfully; and then, taking the lovely teacher by the arm, she walked her off to the back parlor. "Now, Miss Nero, Miss Domitian, Miss — whatever name is bad enough for you, — what do you mean by being so cruel to yourself, you wicked creature? If you don't take an im-

mediate rest and doze on that lounge, you may look out for vengeance from me."

"O you foolish old darling, working every waking minute yourself, and then making such an absurd parade over the inerest nothing I do," responded Miss Searle, dropping her head on her friend's neck with a moment's abandonment, as if it swayed there against her will, enticed by the broad, restful shoulders.

Theodate's dark eyes glowed. It was seldom, pitifully seldom, that Evelyn gave any outward sign of affection beyond a light kiss or a soft pat of one's cheek. She had raised her head even now, and was forcing back the tears. "How cool and cheery you've made the rooms with all this greenery, Date dear. But now, if you're going to scold, run off to the front parlor, and draw the *portièrre*. There, go."

She smiled wearily when left to herself; for, though she had not admitted it, she was tired and sad. It had been one of the days when it seemed as if she could not live any longer without her mother.

"If ever there was comfort and rest in a friend, I have it in Theodate, and I don't know how God came to be so good as to give her to me. But I miss my mother; and I cannot even say I miss her, or it will break Date's heart. O mother, mother, where are you gone?"

Evelyn turned her eyes away from the empty chair by the window: there was an intolerable void there. She glanced at the next window, but the woodbine against it nodded, "No, she is not here;" and the tree at the foot of the terrace rustled softly, "She will not come again." And this must still be borne, the "staying away" of the best beloved.

The door-bell had rung. Theodate was entertaining a visitor in the parlor, — by the voice, old Mrs. Putnam; and Evelyn smiled to hear the curt sentences which Theodate doled out to her, — the Theodate who could be to those she loved all warmth and kindness.

“What ails Evelyn, did you say?”

“She is tired from overwork.”

“You don’t say! Why, all she does is a little writing, ain’t it? Keeps a girl too. Ain’t Rosa good for any thing?”

“Rosa does very well.”

“Have you seen Mrs. Morgan lately?”

“I believe not.”

“But you’ve heard what’s going about her?”

“No.”

“You haven’t? Why, there’s a dreadful sight said about Mrs. Morgan lately.”

“Indeed,” said Theodate with suppressed ire.

“But there is one comfort, Mrs. Putnam: we are not obliged to listen to it.”

A dead silence followed, probably of disappointment and chagrin, during which Evelyn laughed all by herself, wondering how Theodate could have had the heart to cut off the old lady so summarily from her anticipated gossip. Mrs. Putnam was merely empty-minded, not malicious; and Evelyn would have listened to her little story with a mild protest, and then deftly turned the conversation to safer topics. But there was no compromise in Theodate, none of the innocent adroitness which made Evelyn such a prime favorite in society; or, as Miss Searle expressed it, “You can’t trifle with Theodate, the grand creature.”

As might have been predicted, the old lady hastened to finish her dry call ; and Theodate soon after left the house, with a charge to Rosa that Miss Evelyn must not be disturbed on any account, as she was probably asleep. Rosa listened with respectful incredulity to this bold flight of the imagination. Miss Date was always fancying Miss Evelyn was tired, and begging her to go to sleep, — a thing Miss Evelyn had never yet done in the day-time, so far as Rosa knew. In view of this fact, it is not surprising that the girl quite forgot the injunction that she “ must not be disturbed.”

At half-past five, the train from Boston having been in just forty minutes, Rosa was summoned to the door by a caller, Mr. Bryant Fiske. She gave a little scream of pleased surprise ; for she had always liked the man who had told her once, in such “ pooty French,” that her eyes were bright. He was pale and slightly incoherent, but must see Miss Searle immediately, he said. He gave her no card. None was needed, she thought, from an old friend like this. So, without a moment’s hesitation, she ushered him unannounced into the back parlor, where sat Miss Evelyn regaling herself with poetry and lemonade. It was one of Rosa’s officious blunders, such as she herself was quick to see and regret when too late.

Miss Evelyn turned very white, and let the book fall, as she rose and extended her hand, when the quick color surged back to her face. She wanted to retreat, and then wanted to make that retreat a rout ; for the resolved look in the youth’s face intimidated her.

“ You see,” said he, as Rosa vanished in dismay, “ you see I have come.”

"Yes; we did not know you thought of it."

"No; it was a sudden freak."

He would not sit; and she, too, remained standing.

"Did you receive my second letter, Mr. Fiske?"

"Yes; and I find now, Miss Searle, that you did answer my first one. But, do you know, your answer did not reach me till last week."

"How strange!"

"Where was it lying all the while? It was written the first of June, but not mailed from here till last week."

"I do not know, Mr. Fiske. I was astonished when I learned you had not received it. I never knew our postmaster to hold a letter over. He is very careful."

"Well, I got it at last; but I don't consider it a final answer."

"O Mr. Fiske!"

"Don't speak to me. I can't bear it. Don't crush me yet."

She did not look very formidable surely, standing there trembling visibly, and supporting herself by the back of a chair.

"Though that is just what I came for, — your final answer. I could not wait any longer. I've been waiting ever since the world began."

"Pray be seated, Mr. Fiske."

He was gyrating now, with one arm thrown round the back of his neck, as if lassoing himself, — an old gesture she remembered. She excused herself a moment, and slipped out to bid Rosa bring some cold lemonade; and when she came back, a little more

self-possessed, he was pacing the floor with quick strides.

"I don't know why you wrote such a letter, but what does that matter now? I am here, and you can change it all. Did you think me — *do* you think me presumptuous?"

He spoke in a half-frightened way, for something indefinable in her air reminded him that she must consider him very young. Either she had matured a little, or he had rejuvenated; for the difference between them had increased within a year. But how seraphic she looked in that blue dress! Like a Madonna in a cloud. Poor Joe! He would have felt bitterly discouraged if he had known how he himself looked at that moment, — for all the world like a schoolboy called out on the floor for mischief.

"Tell me, Miss Searle, you never thought *that*."

"Oh, no! I simply thought you had made a mistake; and I'm sure you will see it for yourself, by and by."

He ceased gyrating, and looked up at her despairingly. How came she by that icicle in her bosom, called a heart?

"You don't mean that. You don't leave it there finally. O Miss Searle, you can't be so cruel!"

She felt positively faint. If she had only had a little of Theodate's courage in facing people with the truth! In her place, Theodate would have settled the matter forever with a decisive word; while Evelyn was obliged to go over the ground again and again, without making any visible progress. Mr. Fiske was terribly depressed, but allowed himself to be persuaded to

stay to tea. Miss Wilder kindly undertook to cheer him, but without success; and at eight o'clock he was about to withdraw with a reproachful, broken-hearted adieu, when Mr. Kirke dropped in, and created a diversion. He was unfeignedly surprised to see Mr. Fiske; for having been out of town all day, bicycling, he had not heard of his arrival. But it was very plain that his pleasure in the meeting was not shared by Mr. Fiske, who, to use a figure of speech, embraced him as the Arabs did Islam, "at the point of the sword."

"I saw Gertrude and Lucy the other day. They told me you were here," said Mr. Fiske, twirling his light mustache with something like defiance; and then he sat down again. A minute before he had not thought any thing worth while, even the effort to live; but now it occurred to him that he would really like to know on what sort of footing Ben Kirke was received at this house. He would stay and see for himself. He had not been well pleased to hear of his coming to Narransauc: the news had fallen upon him like a shock, as well it might; for he considered Narransauc his own discovery, and had hoarded it from the profane world like a miser's treasure. He had yet to learn where Ben Kirke ever heard of the town.

"Kirke," said he, rallying with an effort, and trying to speak in his usual manner, "the last I heard of you, you were bound for Newport; let's see, that day I was up in your room looking at bric-à-brac. What changed your mind all of a sudden?"

"Oh, I was never really committed to Newport!" returned Mr. Kirke, concealing his embarrassment under a nonchalant manner, for he fancied the eyes

of both young ladies were fixed upon him curiously. They must have wondered from the first what had brought him to this remote village.

"I was amazed when I heard of you away up here, bicycle and all. Didn't know you ever heard of the place," continued Mr. Fiske with unconscious petulance.

"Ever heard of the place? Do you suppose a beautiful, high-bred sort of town like this can be hidden in a napkin? The only thing to be amazed about," continued Mr. Kirke maliciously, "is your not sending me up here yourself. When I found you'd been here, and become acquainted, it struck me as rather shabby of you that you hadn't told me, Joe."

Joe could make no reply to this, beyond a forced laugh. He had not wished Ben Kirke to discover Narransauc, and he had therefore carefully refrained from mentioning the town in his hearing. Still he hardly knew himself why he had so refrained. "The heart has reasons that reason cannot understand." But he was effectually worsted now, and relapsed into silence with that peculiar setness of the lips, suggestive, in common phrase, of biting an imaginary board-nail. The worst of it was that the conversation went on very well without him. He might have slipped out of the room, and nobody would have missed him; but on that very account he preferred to stay and torture himself by jealous watchfulness of Mr. Kirke and Evelyn. Unhappy boy! he had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing what he brought eyes to see.

"She never talked to me with such animation, never. Wish I were taller, so she'd have to raise her

chin that way when she looks at me. How prettily she does it! But he is used to seeing chins raised, and doesn't notice it. He's not taking the least pains to be agreeable; sits there as easy as if he were in his own den at home. Yes, that's the way he charms them all, just by not caring. Now, do you call that fair?" He gave his mustache a downward, despairing pull. There was something intensely provoking about Ben Kirke, — if you happened to be Joe Fiske. "Slower than the growth of a tree. Why, I could turn round three times while he's getting ready to speak. Yet that's the sort of fellow that takes with women. Queer. How Miss Wilder's eyes shine! Never saw her look so handsome. He's drawing her in, drawing them both in; and they don't know it, or he either. Well, yes, he probably knows it; but what does he care? Ben Kirke has had every thing without trying for it all his life, till I suppose it gets monotonous. But I didn't think Evelyn Searle's heart was like a lucifer match, to go off at a touch. No, I didn't," springing up from his chair, lassoing himself by the neck, and sitting down again with an effort.

Mr. Kirke had taken up a volume of Browning's poems, and, at Miss Searle's request, was reading aloud "Evelyn Hope."

"He always did have a trick of reading poetry well. I read poetry aloud to them once myself last summer, but I suppose I clipped it off too quick. Anyway, I noticed they never asked me to do it again."

Mr. Kirke looked over the volume as he finished, saying it was as good as a symposium to read a book

so full of little pencil jottings. He wondered who had marked this volume. Evelyn pleaded guilty. Theodate cared little for Browning, she said, except a few favorite poems; had no patience with his obscurity and affectation. Mr. Kirke defended him warmly, seconded by Evelyn.

"Their tastes agree. I might have known they would," thought Joe, his faint heart sinking still lower. "I remember last summer I used to think of it sometimes when she was talking, that this or that sounded like Ben Kirke; and somehow I never wanted them to meet. It's monstrous! Luck always followed Kirke; but, as for me, I'm Fate's football," with a half-audible groan.

Joe Fiske was among friends that evening, or his absurd conduct would have exposed him to ridicule. Usually a gay, social fellow, "enchanted" as Miss Wilder had described him, he behaved to-night like an intermittent lunatic, sitting in sulky silence glowering upon Mr. Kirke, then suddenly springing up and pacing the floor with muttered exclamations. Miss Wilder, with her remarkable self-control, could treat him exactly as if nothing had happened; but Evelyn was so manifestly unhappy, that Mr. Kirke could not endure it long, and hastened to take his leave, doubting whether Joe would be rational enough to do the same. But the boy sprang out of his chair eagerly, and followed him.

"Here's farewell to the girl who prefers a drone to a working-bee," he muttered between his teeth, as they got outside. "Farewell to the girl that's all sweetness to a stranger, and bitter as death to the man that loves her."

"Now, wait a minute, Joe. Aren't you a little wild? Haven't had any wine, have you?"

"Wine? No; but I'll have it or brandy. Do they keep liquors at the Druid?"

Mr. Kirke had him by the arm now, and, though Joe faintly resisted, was marching him steadily down the gravel path.

"There's a breeze coming up, Joe. 'Twill be a good night to sleep. Hope you'll sleep off your headache."

"Headache? Who said I had a headache? A good night to sleep! That's just like your laziness."

Mr. Kirke offered no further remark, rather relieved than otherwise that Joe consented to go with him. Let the lad say or do what he might, he was still Art Fiske's brother, and as such should be treated with forbearance, and, if possible, brought to his senses.

"You know what ails me, Ben: so no more of your confounded nonsense. You know I love her, and you're trying to step between us."

"Ah! To which lady are you referring? Please specify."

"That's more than I'll stand, sir. As if you didn't know! Didn't you sit there, and go through me with your eyes? You saw me making a fool of myself, and enjoyed it. And now you ask me which one, as if Evelyn Searle had her peer on earth!"

"A fine girl she is, truly," returned Mr. Kirke. "So there's an attachment between you. Well, don't rave at me any longer, Joe. I haven't hurt your cause, and wouldn't try to do it. But, if you say so, I'll take myself out of the way to-morrow."

The imperturbable good-nature of the tone, utterly free from any implied sarcasm, had its effect upon Joe.

"Oh, don't hurry away on my account! I'm perfectly reasonable, Ben, perfectly reasonable. I admit you're not to blame, for you didn't know there was such a girl till you came blundering along into my territory. It's just your luck, and it's just my luck, that's all."

"But what have I done? You'll feel very differently about this to-morrow morning, Joe. Did you sleep last night?"

"Sleep? There it is again. I don't spend my life with my eyes shut. No, I didn't sleep, and sha'n't to-night. What right have you to be on such terms with those girls?"

"There, that will do. I solemnly assure you, Joe, I am not at all in love with Miss Evelyn Searle. And suppose I were, if she ever cared for you, she wouldn't throw you over for me, or any other man."

"I didn't say she cared for me, exactly; that is, she never gave me her word, or any thing so far as that," stammered Joe. "But the field was mine. I know her Boston friends, and all — and — Well, I had reason — Yes, in fact, the field was mine. I make no charges against you, Ben, and I know the thought never entered *her* mind; but it's a mighty hard case for me, your coming up here into my territory. And you so tremendously cool about it, too!"

IX.

*"Passion, as frequently is seen,
Subsiding, settles into spleen."*

GREEN.

MR. FISKE must have enjoyed the pangs of renunciation, for he prolonged them by lingering day after day at Narransauc. He made the fourth in the carryall party to Oak Hill, Ozro following on horseback.

Miss Wilder left a study of lilies fading in water, Miss Searle a study of lovers pining in her portfolio, — lovers were trying factors in her stories, as she never knew how much they ought to suffer, — and both young ladies entered the carryall at two o'clock of the sultry afternoon, with that air of feminine resignation which would cut a man to the heart if he knew how to interpret it, which happily he never does.

Mr. Kirke drove the motley span; Mr. Fiske choosing the back seat beside Miss Wilder, where he could torture himself by watching Miss Searle and his rival. Tom followed at a respectful distance, with the "machine," and the materials for lemonade; laughing in his sleeve at this "photo business," which was the one "loony streak" in the otherwise sensible fellow from Chicago.

Ozro had his own views regarding lunacy, and kept close to the carryall, that he might lose not a word or

a look of Mr. Fiske. Joe was absurd enough, at the best; it was well that no one suspected him of this dawning jealousy of Mr. Kirke, who, for his part, was merely amused by it, and talked unrestrainedly with Miss Searle, though he knew poor Joe was listening in torture to every word.

Oak Hill was somewhat remote from the highway; and on reaching the spot, a hilly old orchard, Tom let down the bars, and they all walked in and upward over the soft grass to the sugar-loaf summit, where they seemed to stand in the very centre of a circular green world.

"What have I told you?" said Miss Wilder triumphantly to Mr. Kirke. "Look there and there," pointing to the distant mountains and ponds and the white outlying villages.

Mr. Kirke looked to order. He had a real appreciation of the beautiful in nature, which was refreshing to Miss Wilder's soul; and she liked to stand with him and Miss Searle in reverential silence, thinking thoughts unutterable. But Mr. Fiske was continually asserting himself, and dispelling the charm.

"How I admired this last summer!" said he with a deep-drawn sigh. "We were here twice,—do you remember it, Miss Searle?—once in a shower."

Oh, yes, she remembered, but not with the enthusiasm he could have desired. She was more interested in seeing Mr. Kirke set up his camera than in listening to reminiscences.

"Going to take a picture, Ben? Well, that is really too droll," said poor Joe, welcoming the opportunity to find fault. Why was the camera set in this spot

instead of that? What was the particular object in being so slow? No wonder the pictures turned out ink-blots. What else could you expect with no pretension to a knowledge of the art? And, in all modesty, he must say he thought he could do better himself.

"Very well," said Mr. Kirke, "suppose you try. This is my sixth and last," slipping a photograph plate into its receptacle, and seating himself comfortably upon the grass.

Joe accepted the challenge eagerly. "Oh, yes, I know how it goes! Just let me alone, Ben. Don't need any help, thank you;" and to work he went with blind zeal upon the very foolish undertaking, while the rest of the party retreated to the shade of the largest apple-tree, relieved at having him off their hands for a while. They could see him moving restlessly to and fro, and hear the sharp sound of the plates as he shot them impatiently into the camera. Did he really expect to outshine stupid Ben at a moment's notice?

"He has an enormous fund of surplus energy; I'm glad he has found something to do," said Miss Searle, looking demurely at nobody, while she plucked up a handful of daisies by the roots.

Ozro fell to laughing immoderately, and wished it understood that he saw something extremely droll in the corn-field across the fence. The secret amusement they all felt in common may have added something to their sense of good-fellowship; for they seemed to get on wonderfully well together, the four souls under the apple-trees: and Joe looked around occasionally, like a sharp-eyed little pedagogue, to see what they were all laughing at,—Ozro toppling over like a card-house;

Miss Wilder shaking in a sort of ague of fun ; Miss Searle swaying like a flower in a breeze, — like a musical flower, if such a thing is imaginable. It was characteristic of Evelyn, this quick response of her light figure to the motions of her mind, almost as if her body thought ; and Mr. Kirke found it charming.

He had always liked to be of use to her ever since her uncle had told him of her excessive grief for her mother. He thought he could partially understand the feeling, for his own mother was the most precious being to him upon earth ; and the anguish he had suffered the previous winter, while she lay hovering between life and death, was an experience never to be forgotten or described. She had been spared to him, thank Heaven ; but his dread glance into the abyss of desolation had given him forevermore a keen sympathy with that particular phase of sorrow. Miss Searle had a happy nature : but there was a pathetic look in her eyes sometimes which went straight to his heart, and nerved him to try all his powers to dispel it ; and in one way or another he usually succeeded.

It was very much the same with Miss Wilder, who had an unacknowledged tendency to blues. He could cheer her with very little effort, and light a merry fire in her gloomy dark eyes. This easy influence over two such minds was a triumph, it must be confessed, to the young man's vanity. What was it in both these young ladies which made him so entirely at home in their society, while, at the same time, they called forth the very best he had to give ? He thought of it to-day as he strode about, with his arms behind him, spinning jests and stories.

He had always known it was rather ungracious in him, but really he had never cared to exert himself much for his lady friends at home ; and, in fact, there had been little need, for the son of rich Judge Kirke was foreordained to please. But here it was different : here he was taken solely on his own merits ; and there is always a stimulus in having a new audience before you, a new reputation to make.

Naturally Joe could not stand this sort of thing long. "What are you all laughing at over there?" said he ; and, throwing up his attempts at art as a bad bargain, he came to join the merry circle. "It's the first time, Ben, that I ever suspected you of being a wit."

"How many pictures have you taken, Joe?"

"Six, the same that you did ; and, if they prove as bad as yours, I'll flee my country," said the despairing lover courteously, and then sank on a sod at Miss Searle's feet with such a woe-begone look that Ozro felt obliged to brace himself against the nearest tree.

"Miss Searle, I never shall forget the terrific thunder-shower that came up when we were out here last summer, and how we took shelter in that hermit's hut. — For that was the day when I could have sworn she was in love with me," went on Joe to himself. "Yet now, I presume, all she was thinking about was how to keep the rain off her bonnet."

"A hermit!" exclaimed Mr. Kirke. "Do you own a curiosity like that, and have never told me?"

"Do you expect an inventory of the town to be given you at a fortnight's notice?" retorted Joe ; then, softening a little, "If he is on exhibition still,

perhaps we could go home by the cross-road and interview him; that is, if the ladies say so."

"It is a vote," cried Ozro, before the ladies could reply.

"Very well, and isn't it time to start now?" said Miss Wilder, rising regretfully from the grassy throne from which she had been overlooking the peaceful world below.

As they entered the carryall, Miss Searle remarked to Mr. Kirke, with what Joe considered undue deference, "I'm sure you'll say Mr. Vose is a genuine hermit. At any rate, he is sufficiently exclusive."

"He that is exclusive excludes himself," quoted Joe.

"What is the matter with him? What made him retire from the world?" asked Mr. Kirke. "I think it's interesting to know the reasons; don't you?"

"The reason was — a woman," said Ozro, bending forward and making a grimace toward the carryall. "The other man was rich, you know."

"I'll warrant it," muttered Joe in an injured tone, which nobody fairly understood or cared to interpret.

"I believe there was once a pretty girl named Betsey Crane," said Miss Searle, "and it is convenient to say that she broke his heart. But I dare say the story is largely traditional. At any rate, he was never heard to complain of Betsey; and the nearest approach he ever made to confiding in any one was to say to my grandfather once, in a tragic tone, 'Misfortune has smiled on me, Mr. Searle.'"

"I am glad misfortune *can* smile," said Miss Wilder,

"but it must be over the left shoulder, — a cold, cruel, crooked smile."

"I have a growing interest in your hermit, Miss Searle. He certainly commands one's respect by not wearing his heart on his sleeve," said Mr. Kirke quietly.

"Good," thought Ozro, ready to shout; "a capital hit. Kirke knows how to do it. Well, he is the coolest fellow."

They were approaching now a dreary stretch of sand, the only blot on all the fair green landscape.

"Vassal Vose's estate," said Miss Searle with a light wave of the hand. "It is said there was hardly a peck of sand here when he came; but it has been blowing broadcast from year to year, and he has taken real satisfaction in watching the spread of it. A desert is more to his taste than a garden of spices."

"I feel quite oppressed," said Miss Wilder. "Isn't it fearful to think how the fairest, most exquisite faculties of the human mind are capable of perversion?"

"Well," exclaimed Joe with a black look, "you needn't tell me a man that has been fairly treated would get in such a condition. It stands to reason that somebody is to blame for it."

In the midst of this forlorn waste, in the shelter of a rock, stood a tiny hut of pine logs, fitted together with toggles and pins, and filled at every crevice with cluster moss.

"He built it himself," explained Miss Searle. "See, there are shutters to every window, and all closed. He will not have even the honest sun peep at him. Ah, here he is now! Look, Mr. Kirke."

"Can't she ask me to look, too?" thought the spoiled child on the back seat.

A crooked man, coatless and hatless, was crossing the road before them, swinging a stick in his hand.

"As the old woman said of the hippopotamus, 'Ain't he plain?' " said Ozro.

His straggling, unkempt hair resembled the fine fur of some wild animal; his body was bent like a siphon; and he looked down at the ground, as if scorning to notice the approach of such a paltry thing as a carriage-load of human beings.

"How d'ye, Vassal?" called out Ozro; but his words fell upon empty space. The strange being pursued his way in silence to an iron teakettle boiling over a little fire on a heap of stones, where he halted, and held one end of his stick, a white ashen one, carefully over the steam of the kettle.

"Hullo, Vassal; how's the polo business? Is that a good polo stick?" The hermit wagged his head slowly, miserly of his words as of every thing else. But Ozro meant that Mr. Kirke should hear his voice, which he had told him sounded more like the clink of small change than like any thing human.

"Look here, Vassal, they do say your polo sticks beat the world. Now, what'll you take for that one?"

The grim mouth opened, and a metallic sound issued.

"Fo'pence ha'penny," he replied, surprised into speech.

"Good gracious, what a price!" shrieked the mischievous Ozro, touching whip to his pony and bounding off without the least warning; leaving the old man

glaring after him, his hitherto blank features working with rage and amazement.

"I'll buy it, and two more, if you have them to sell," said Mr. Kirke, who found no pleasure in cheating the poor wreck of humanity out of a compound word, and disappointing him in a trade.

The bargain was concluded, and the carryall drove on, leaving poor Vassal muttering his delight over such unprecedented luck.

"Just like Ben. I wish I had thought to do it myself; such little things go so far with the women," mused Joe.

"Mr. Vose's troubles haven't seemed to sanctify him," said he aloud.

"No," returned Miss Wilder. "One would suppose his remarkable constancy to Betsey might have left a shade of softness on his visage, but unfortunately it has not."

"Which gives us food for thought," said Mr. Kirke. "Haven't our poets something to answer for in that regard? They rave continually about constancy, yet here we see for ourselves what an utterly silly and ridiculous thing it is in real life." He spoke meditatively, as of love-stricken swains in general; but Joe felt the application, and stirred uneasily.

"Constancy, do you call it? I call it obstinacy," exclaimed Miss Wilder, furtively pinning up her back hair.

"Yes," said Mr. Kirke, "obstinacy is the better word. No man of common-sense would wreck his life for a woman who doesn't care a pin whether he's alive or dead."

Joe thrust his head abruptly out of the window. "Look at that superb mountain chain."

"But," went on Mr. Kirke in a lower tone, so low that Joe could not catch the words, "but our friend the hermit was a mere boy, was he not, when it happened? He must have been very young, or he would have known 'there was more in him than could be killed by such a thing as that.'"

Miss Searle turned quickly. It was a saucy venture in Mr. Kirke to make this quotation from her own letter, but she did not recognize it; she only wondered vaguely where she had heard those words before.

"And he was not killed," said she, laughing; "his heart is only shut up in his crooked body, like a white bear taking a winter nap."

"True," said Miss Wilder; "and, for my part, I believe his cold heart would have gone to sleep all the same if he had married Miss Betsey, or indeed if she had never been born."

"But wasn't she a fortunate woman?" said Mr. Kirke. "I'd like to congratulate her on her happy escape."

"If such are your sentiments," cried Ozro, galloping back to meet the carriage, "if such are your real sentiments, just stop at our house, and we'll all drink to Miss Betsey's health in a glass of raspberry shrub."

Accordingly, when they reached Mr. Searle's, they halted at the gate, and were merrily touching glasses with a "three times three to the fickle Miss Betsey," when the ubiquitous Mr. Crabtree came leaping across the stile of a neighboring field, exclaiming, "Well, well, how do you do, Mr. Fiske, and how do you

do again? I heard you was here. Come to stop long?"

Mr. Fiske aroused himself, and shook hands cordially. He knew his last summer's reputation for gayety and affability, and it would never do to let Mr. Crabtree go off and tell the gossips how he had changed.

"Oh, I came up for a peep at you all, and to get Kirke home!" said he jovially. "Too dissipated here for Kirke; he's grown wild."

Mr. Crabtree looked keenly at Mr. Kirke and Evelyn, who seemed quite at home together, he fancied, on the front seat. "I see, I see. I didn't mistrust, when I met him the other day in the cars, that he was going to kind o' settle down here like one of our own folks."

"Neither did I," laughed Mr. Kirke.

Miss Searle said nothing; but there was a reserved sweetness in her smile, Mr. Fiske thought, which caused him to glower unconsciously upon Ben, and justified the shrewd Mr. Crabtree in telling his wife at tea-time that "something was up with that little whipper-snapper of a Joe Fiske. He looked as if he'd got his death-warrant; and Evelyn was at the bottom of it, of course, though he never *had* thought she was one of that kind."

X.

"What is will for, if it cannot help us in emergencies?"

EMERSON.

"WHEN are you going home, old man?" Mr. Fiske considered himself in a state of "qualified war" with Mr. Kirke, but was as communicative as ever, and had just accepted an invitation to ride with him into the country.

"Joe, what do you mean?" said Mr. Kirke, taking up the reins, and looking him steadily in the eye.

There was a latent force in Ben that now and then asserted itself in a glance or a tone, causing the younger man to quail for a moment. "I thought this thing was settled once for all between us, Joe. Didn't you say yesterday you gave it up, and didn't care a rush how I disposed of myself?"

"Well, and I don't. You may see her every hour in the day, for all me; but what's that to do with your answering a civil question?"

"Oh, well, as to going home, let us see! I haven't fairly thought it out yet. Where's the hurry?"

"I should think Randall might have a word to say about that," was the retort; "and he would, if he wasn't such a willing ox. You've heard of the ox in the yoke that was willing to pull, and the other ox was willing he should?"

Ben's brow darkened for a second; but, reflecting

that it was hardly worth while to take offence, he prudently remained silent.

"I asked your plans, Kirke, because, if you think of going soon, I may as well wait, and go with you."

There was a pause while Mr. Kirke flicked a fly off the horse with the whip-lash, and Joe looked at him sharply. It was a clever face, and a strong one, with a dash of sarcasm about the mouth, — or so Joe read it, — and a pair of hazel eyes that expressed as much or as little as their owner pleased. Just now they expressed nothing whatever to Joe's scrutiny, wearing the shut-in look suggestive to Ben's sisters of "drawing the blinds."

"I suppose Chicago will be there right along," said Mr. Kirke at last; "and, in case the willing ox doesn't object, I believe I'll finish out the summer here."

Joe sank back overpowered. "Settle down here for good, Kirke. Don't regard my feelings. What am I? If I should die to-morrow, you'd sleep just as well for it."

"Joe, is it of the least use to ask you to be reasonable?"

"Reasonable? I think myself I'm pretty tremendously reasonable, considering you've ruined my prospects for life."

"Take care, sir."

"Oh, your not knowing it makes no difference! You're weaving a spell all the same. I tell you, Ben, if you cared two straws about the girl, I could bear it. But to see you simply sit still in that everlastingly lazy way of yours, and let her grow into liking you!"

"Nonsense!" returned Ben, a sudden light leaping

into his eyes, which it was as well Joe did not see. "There's not a particle of truth in what you say. You've placed me in a ridiculous light before her whenever you could."

Joe cowered a little.

"What did you talk about last night up there? Do you suppose a man wants all his college nonsense raked over before ladies? I tell you, Joe, if I considered you in a sane state of mind, I'd give you the soundest thumping you ever had in your life."

"Well, now, look here, old man, what sent you up here in the first place? If you'd only staid away, I should have won her. But you've stepped between us; and now, God pity me, my chance is over!"

This outburst of unreason moved Mr. Kirke in divers ways, — to box the boy's ears, to laugh at him, to throw an arm around him and let him cry on his shoulder. A silly fellow, surely, was Joe. He had declared repeatedly, that, if it wasn't for his mother, he wouldn't hesitate to blow out his brains. But he had reached the point now, — so he went on to declare, — when his mother no longer stood in the way; and the pistol should do its deadly work — to-morrow or the day after.

It was hard to have patience with him, or treat his woes seriously.

"If I'm ever such a fool as to fall in love where there's no hope for me, I won't howl over it," thought the comfortable, well-cared for, unsentimental Ben Kirke, as contempt got the better of pity.

Still, though he was so sure that this meant nothing serious in Joe's case, and would soon blow over, his conscience was not altogether easy. He had not been

quite frank with the lad to whom he really owed his acquaintance with Evelyn Searle. He had never told him, — how could he? — of the intercepted letter, and the influence it had had in bringing him to Narransauc. His coming had not hurt Joe's cause, for Joe never had a cause; but no doubt it had had its effect in making the boy behave a great deal worse than he would otherwise have done, by exciting his jealousy, which was always his weak point. And, after all, he was Art's brother; and *had* it been fair?

Mr. Kirke had no faith in Joe's leaving Narransauc at present, nor had Joe himself much faith in it. He pretended to be fully decided, but changed his mind secretly a dozen times; and though he went so far next morning as to pack his portmanteau, and ride over to the station with his friend, he was still in a turmoil of doubt.

"That cold-blooded Kirke! If he would only show some sign that he's glad to be rid of me, there'd be some sense in going."

The train was made up, the few passengers had all entered the car.

"Good-by, old fellow. See you again," said Joe, planting one foot on the step, with a swinging motion.

"Well, good-by, Fiske."

"Wait a minute," cried Joe, swinging himself down again. "I—I believe I'll give it up, after all."

"Very well, why not?" returned Mr. Kirke civilly.

If he had betrayed the slightest annoyance, Mr. Fiske would have staid; but the indifference settled it. Joe caught at the railing as the car began to move off, and at some risk succeeded in boarding the train.

Mr. Kirke laughed: who could have helped it? The bystanders laughed too. They had been watching the very nimble young man's gyrations for some time with interest; and one beholder now said to another, —

“An uneasy fish, but he got hauled in at last.”

Mr. Kirke drove back to the Druid, feeling as light as a feather. It would be in order to call at Violet Hill this evening, and report the news, which he knew would be thankfully received.

As he drove across the bridge, he could see that something unusual was going on at the Druid. A dozen neighbors — men, women, and children — were hurrying in and out of the house; and presently the landlord rushed bareheaded into the middle of the street, exclaiming, “Hello, there, Kirke, you’ll have to hitch your own horse: Tom is done for. Hitch your horse, and come right in; Tom is in a fix.”

“What is it? Shall I go for the doctor?”

“Doctor?” repeated an energetic old lady on the piazza, rolling her right sleeve up to the elbow. “You can’t get any doctor in this town, not if you’re dead and laid out.”

“Father’s dead; funeral at Saccarap,” cried an officious little boy.

“Oh, is that it? Poor Tom!”

“No, no; not Tom’s father, the *doctor’s* father. Tom’s broke his leg,” vociferated Mr. Simpson at last, his face nearly plum-color with suppressed speech.

“And no doctor to come anigh,” supplemented the old lady, pulling her sleeve down again.

“I’ll tell you how he broke his leg,” struck in the officious little boy. “He came bump up against that

photo-machine o' yours, out in the stable, covered up with hay."

Mr. Kirke was more noted for strength than speed; but he was not long now in brushing through the hindering crowd, and making his way to Tom, who lay on the wooden settle in the bar-room, groaning with every breath, and protesting that he would not, could not, should not, be moved till Dr. Cargill arrived, who had been sent for from St. Gregory. This might be an hour hence, it might be more; for Mr. Simpson was afraid the horse's loose shoe would make some difference. The fleet horse Dick had been in use by Mr. Kirke, and they had taken Jack in their haste; though Mrs. Simpson was sure now that time would have been saved if they had gone to the station for Dick. This she had just been saying; and, in the kindness of her heart, Mrs. Crabtree had added that she didn't believe Dr. Cargill was at home, anyhow. She had heard of his going to Prince Edward's Island; and why *hadn't* somebody thought to tell Nathan, the messenger, to get Dr. Perrin?"

"Why, Dr. Perrin is a homœopath: *he* can't set bones," responded another woman, equally kind.

These remarks, and others of like nature, had been passing freely around the circle, no doubt to Tom's edification. But his knitted brows relaxed a little now at sight of Mr. Kirke; and he inclined his head toward him, as if half expecting some sort of aid or comfort from the stalwart young man, who had the look of being equal to any emergency.

"Courage, Tom, my boy. Mr. Crabtree and I together can carry you up-stairs to your own bed so

easily that you won't know it. We'll handle you like a glass vase. Won't you trust us, Tom?"

The tone was re-assuring; and there was a certain masterful, self-possessed air about Mr. Kirke that had always had a strong but indescribable influence on Tom.

"Well, I guess you can do it, seeing's you think you can," sighed he trustfully, and closing his eyes resigned himself at once to the two gentle-handed bearers, who made the journey with signal success. As they neared Tom's chamber, Mr. Kirke saw that it was low, small, and ill-furnished, with flies pouring in at the open window like gossips flocking to a tea-party.

"Not there; we can't put him there," said he audaciously to Mrs. Simpson, who walked in advance of the litter. "Show us a better room, larger, with window-screens and curtains."

Mrs. Simpson seemed amazed; but, reflecting that Mr. Kirke was the sort of man to pay for what he called for, she led the way to the north room, which had been set off from the old dancing-hall, and, though seldom used, was really the most comfortable summer resort the house afforded. Tom, in his soiled working-suit, his feet incased in dusty boots, was extended upon the dainty lavender-scented bed; and the much-tried Mrs. Simpson cast an eloquent glance upon Mrs. Crabtree, who might be supposed, as a woman and a housekeeper, to understand her feelings. Then followed a remark which would have electrified both ladies if they had heard it.

"May I examine your hurt, my boy?" said Mr. Kirke in a low tone, leaning over the patient. "Be-

cause, if it's nothing worse than a broken bone, I can set it myself."

Tom ceased groaning from sheer surprise. "I wouldn't do it if the doctor gets here in good time, you understand, Tom, or if you can wait till he comes. I've no desire to take the business out of his hands."

"I know enough for that; you're fooling with me like," returned Tom coolly, feeling that such jests were rather ill-timed; but that he must try not to take offence, considering the source.

Mr. Kirke gave his grimy hand a kindly pressure. "I'm not fooling with you, Tom. I'd be ashamed to do it after you've come to your death by that infernal 'machine' of mine. But you needn't think I'm a bungler at every thing, as I am at pictures. I can mend this little breakage of yours, and make you as good as new: so keep up your heart, my boy."

"Why in the world doesn't Nathan come?" said Mrs. Simpson anxiously.

"Why, here he is," exclaimed Mrs. Crabtree, from her post by the window; "but he's all sole alone. I should have thought he'd have brought somebody, if it was nothing but that homypath."

Nathan, being interviewed, defended himself stoutly. How could he fetch folks that weren't there to *be* fetched? The doctors were all gone kiting, and of course he had come back to report and take a fresh start for Liter's Falls. What else *could* he do?

"How long am I going to lie here and stand this?" wailed Tom, left alone with Mr. Crabtree and Mr. Kirke. "What was it you said just now, Mr. Kirke? Did you mean honest you could set my bones?"

"I did Tom; can't you believe me?" The tone was clear, firm, and re-assuring.

"A natural bonesetter, hey?" said Mr. Crabtree with his loudest laugh; while Tom regarded Mr. Kirke with a look of awe second only to that he might have felt for a two-headed animal or other monstrosity.

"It has come in my way to set three broken bones, and one was a compound fracture."

"Did they heal first-rate?" asked Mr. Crabtree cautiously.

"Yes, to a charm."

"All right," said Tom. "Go ahead. I'll risk it if you will."

Mr. Crabtree laughed again, whether at the "natural bonesetter's" rashness or the patient's credulity did not appear. But he said next moment, "Yes, Kirke, try it; and I'll bear you out in it. I don't believe you'd undertake any thing you couldn't carry through." And, as Tom would wait no longer, it was tried accordingly, Mr. Crabtree lending his aid and countenance.

"I tell you what it is," said Mr. Crabtree afterwards, in tones of unqualified admiration, "I don't believe there's a full-fledged Philadelphia doctor could have handled that case any better than what Kirke did. Knew just where every thing ought to go, and laid 'em all together as neat as a pin. I never saw anybody go to work so handy."

It is no more than the truth to say that the young man had a real enthusiasm for a thing of this sort, a loving interest in wrecks of matter, which is simply incomprehensible to the average mind. Tom could not have done him better service than to go to pieces

in this way, and allow himself to be put together again.

When Dr. Campbell arrived from Liter's Falls after all was over, and there was nothing left to do, he expressed entire satisfaction with the lay performance, and advised the amateur surgeon by all means to keep the case. He doubted if he himself could manage it better.

"That's right," said Tom, turning to Mr. Kirke with the affectionate, pleading look of a wounded dog. "You'll stay by me, won't you, sir?"

The young man felt that he was "in for it." He had never been depended upon to "stay by" anybody; but there was no resisting a look like that from Tom, especially since the poor fellow owed his mishap to that "machine," which had never been set in any spot yet where it had not been in somebody's way.

"Yes, Tom, I'll stay by you," said Mr. Kirke, so promptly that nobody suspected it cost him an effort. He liked surgery, and why not nursing? At least, Mrs. Simpson was sure a little care and responsibility wouldn't hurt him a grain.

"He'll find it some work trotting back and forth to the north room, it's so out of the way. But I can't say I pity him much," said she, in confidence to Mrs. Crabtree. "He would put Tom in there, and now he must take the consequences."

XI.

"Blessed is he who hath found his work; let him ask no other blessedness."

CARLYLE.

TOM proved a most exacting patient. The strong, stirring young fellow had never before been "laid up" a day in his life; and now, with no amusement but to lie and think what he would like to do if he could "get round," it was surprising how his imagination was quickened, and how many things in remote places he thought of, and came to consider indispensable to his well-being and comfort. He would hardly allow Mr. Kirke out of his sight; and the young man thought with a sigh of Cobb's brook, and its "shadowy water with a sweet south wind blowing over it," and the trout darting through it in all their "speckled pride."

Toward evening Tom grew fretful. "You ain't going off to leave me," he besought, as the self-installed nurse ventured to recommend solitude to his patient, as conducive to sleep. "Why, I can't shut my eyes unless I know you are sitting right there by me."

"Oh, I'll stay with you, Tom, if you'll be quiet! Do you know you've talked for two hours like a delirious magpie?"

It was the first entire evening that Mr. Kirke had spent without a run to Violet Hill, and he regarded

Tom as childish and unreasonable. It had been a sultry day, and the next was still more oppressive; Mr. Cromwell, the tin-man, expressing grave fears that it would "unsodder him." Mr. Kirke wondered how it was faring with the "young ladies," and on inquiring of Jimmy Skillings learned that they "hadn't, either of 'em, been out that day. He guessed likely they had a sight of work to do."

They were indeed busy, but had found time to think of Mr. Kirke, and say to each other, "Why hasn't he been in?" Rosa had heard of Tom's mishap, but not of Mr. Kirke's surgical feat. "Tom's limb was broken," she said.

"What, his arm?"

"No: his limb. If it was his arm, I should have said so," returned the extremely proper little maid.

Andrew Cromwell, who came the next afternoon to work on the roof, informed the young ladies that Mr. Kirke had left the day before for Chicago. And was it not strange that he should have gone without so much as a word of good-by?

"I thought he meant to stay at least several days longer, for you know he spoke of another ride," said Miss Wilder.

"He must have changed his mind rather suddenly," returned Miss Searle, taking up a spray of mountain fringe from the hall table, and placing it carefully in the bronze vase on the window-sill.

Miss Wilder looked through the screen-door at the summer fields, and said, as if she were reading the words in the air, "But he has not gone, Evelyn. I don't believe he would be so rude."

This was a bold denial, considering that Andrew had actually seen him enter the cars; but whatever Theodate said in that slow, positive way of hers seemed rather surer than the evidence of one's own senses.

"Maybe you're right," said Miss Searle, but with no appearance of especial interest. She had agreed with her friend that they should miss Mr. Kirke, that his calls had been their best entertainment this summer. But just now her mind seemed to be engrossed in the new tin gutter which was being laid upon the roof. "Is it nearly done, Andrew?" said she anxiously to the eye-servant, who was standing on a ladder near the piazza. The work had been promised weeks ago, and Miss Searle was becoming impatient.

"Well, I don't know certain," replied Andrew, pretending to consider the matter as he gazed down unflinchingly into the innocent eyes raised to his. "This is a slow, puttering job, you see; and I've had every thing to hinder me."

"I should think he'd be ashamed to lie to her in that way, when she believes every word he says," thought Reuben Wyman, the assistant workman, who knelt on the grass watching his irons heating in a small iron stove, from the top of which issued a towering smoke, like the genii ascending from the vial.

Astonished and alarmed, the birds had left their nests in the piazza roof and were flying away with loud cries, to report to their neighbors that the world was about to burn up. Andrew came down the ladder a few steps, and peered cautiously under the roof. "You have phœbes building here every year, I take it."

"Yes, these corner-lots are never vacant. — O An-

drew, Andrew, you are not going now!" as the young tinman leisurely dropped to the ground, and began to put on his coat.

"Yes, ma'am. I lack about a foot of tin. Can't go back for it to-night. Got to go now and mend Simpson's lead pipe. I'll be back to-morrow," replied the finished liar, without the quiver of an eyelash; though it was simply his inveterate "shiftlessness" that was sending him home to an early supper, and he knew that Miss Wilder knew it, if Miss Searle did not.

Both the ladies were speechless, for what would speech have availed? But Miss Searle stood for a few moments on the piazza, allowing herself to feel the full force of her disappointment. The young apprentice looked at her compassionately, being not yet hardened in the guileful ways of his craft. There against the roof leaned the ladder; there on the lovely grass lay scattered the unsightly old shingles; and, though the shed was out of sight from the piazza, the boy knew it was disgraced by a broken window which Andrew had promised to mend. After precious time spent by Miss Searle in seeking and then in watching these workmen, they had effected nothing but this miserable chaos; and when Andrew would find it convenient to come back with that "foot of tin" who could say? She went to the other end of the piazza, and was looking up with a troubled air at the empty birds'-nests, when Cousin Ozro dropped down upon her suddenly from the roof; and next moment Mr. Kirke was saying, "Good-evening; your cousin is responsible for bringing me round by way of the orchard."

Miss Searle's face brightened visibly as she extended

her hand, and Mr. Kirke was sure he could not be mistaken in thinking she was certainly glad to see him. She did not say that his coming to-night had been unexpected; but he learned it next moment from Miss Wilder, who came out exclaiming cordially, —

“ Ah, so you are not gone, after all? — There, Evelyn, what did I say? ”

“ Could you think for a moment that I would steal out of town without letting you know it? ” returned Mr. Kirke, in some surprise, though immensely flattered. So his going away would really have been a matter of regret to the young ladies. So they had been discussing it with interest. So that was why Miss Searle had met him with such a smile. Well, he was glad he had found out that they really cared a little about him, and were not disposed to throw him over on Joe’s account; for he had often felt that he suffered vicariously for Joe, by being always associated with him in their minds. He had fancied, the last time he called with that turbulent youth, that Miss Searle had looked at them both with nearly equal disfavor; for Joe had contrived on that occasion to place him in a most ridiculous light.

“ What of Mr. Fiske? Has he really gone? ” asked Miss Wilder with a humorous look.

“ Yes, really. At any rate, I saw him enter the car. ”

“ I fancy Mr. Fiske is not feeling very well; he is astonishingly thin this summer, ” said Miss Wilder.

“ Very thin, ” echoed Miss Searle, without venturing to meet any one’s eye. And so the subject of poor Joe was dropped as by one consent, and even Ozro did not venture to take it up again. In fact, Ozro’s mischievous spirit was inclined just now in another direc-

tion. He had conceived the idea that he would like an invitation to supper, and was intriguing to bring it about.

"What is that, Evelyn," pretending to misunderstand something she was trying to say: "lawn tea? Why, I'm glad you thought of it! That's capital."

Of course she had neither said nor thought a word of the sort: but the rogue knew well enough, that, after this suggestion, a lawn tea would be inevitable; and so it proved. It was only half-past five, the heat of the day had not abated in the least, and Mr. Kirke had just been saying that the piazza, with the breeze from the river, was the coolest place he had seen. He had left Tom safely asleep, and there was no reason why he might not accept this very tempting invitation, which came, as he honestly supposed, from headquarters; and he accepted it accordingly.

"Ozro shall suffer for this," thought Miss Wilder, as she disappeared to the kitchen to give her orders to Rosa. Fortunately there was a roasted chicken in reserve for to-morrow's dinner, and there were plenty of strawberries on the vines; but this did not lessen in the least the deep guilt of Ozro, who neither knew nor cared any thing about the state of the larder. It might have been worse; and, despite the annoyance she naturally felt at being forced into this impromptu hospitality, Miss Wilder could not but admit that she should enjoy a social meal with such an agreeable guest as Mr. Kirke. Rosa would not mind bringing out the light table and the landscape china, old and precious, and should make cream biscuits; she seldom failed with these. But what had gone amiss with Rosa, that

she whistled so joyously? For it was always misfortune that called forth her sweetest strains. Miss Wilder entered the kitchen prepared for a catastrophe, but nothing worse had happened than the overturning of a pitcher of rich buttermilk on the unpainted shed floor.

"Oh, yes, mum, cream biscuits; yes, mum! They'll be easy mixed, and I'll fetch out the table and all," responded Rosa, on her knees scrubbing the floor, while the "grave-yard rabbit," suspended from her neck, beat what might be called a lively funeral march. She thoroughly liked Miss Date, yet there were reasons why she considered lawn teas a nonsensical nuisance. "Ain't you afraid they'll break the chiny out there, mum? It's hard getting the table sut just even."

"Slice the cold chicken, Rosa," said Miss Date, who had a way quite foreign to Miss Evelyn of "shutting up" the little maid. "And give us iced tea and strawberries, and we'll eat at seven," was the final order.

It was a tempting table that was spread on the lawn before the piazza; and Ozro hoped Mr. Kirke was duly grateful to him for the meal, and duly impressed by the lovely way in which his cousin Evelyn presided. He was proud of Evelyn at any time; and to-night, with that flush on her cheeks, she was what he elegantly termed a "raving, tearing beauty." Rosa was of the same opinion. Coming in with the biscuits, she gazed lingeringly at her mistress in her fleecy white gown, and thought if she could be borne straight up to heaven on a mighty, rushing wind, looking as she did this minute, the angels would gladly make room for her, and never doubt she was one of their own. "Such

crispy, goldy hair ! And that easy way she moves her head and arms, as if they didn't weigh a feather ! I won't like her better'n I do Miss Date, though ; for it's Miss Date that most generally always helps me wash-days, and I'll like *her* best, if it kills me." And she took dutiful care to throw Miss Wilder a smile as she disappeared with the cake-plate ; only the smile glanced off perversely, and was caught on the way in the meshes of "crispy, goldy hair," a mistake which Miss Wilder would have pardoned freely, if she had known it.

Theodate was looking very happy to-night, though she was always happier than people supposed. Her eyes had a look of measureless content, as they swept the far-reaching landscape below and around her and rested at last on the dark-blue mountain range softly outlined against the western sky. Was there on earth a fairer spot ? She thought not, and Miss Wilder was a young lady of decided opinions. She had come to it two years ago from the total wreck of a home, and found shelter, peace, and loving-kindness ; and were it possible for Violet Hill to crumble by to-morrow into a sandy desert, like Vassal Vose's estate, it would remain forever dear and sacred to her grateful heart.

The conversation turned naturally upon Tom's mishap ; and, with Ozro for a trumpeter, Mr. Kirke became the hero of the hour.

"I tell you, girls, he's a stunner. The doctor from Liter's Falls says he didn't leave any rough edges, and he'd trust him as quick as he would a professional hand."

This was all new to the young ladies, and seemed at first incredible. "What, you, Mr. Kirke, without

any knowledge of the art?" exclaimed Miss Searle with very wide eyes.

"Oh, I have a superficial knowledge, enough to serve in an exigency!"

"Now, you needn't believe that. He's altogether too modest," cried the admiring Ozro.

"Of course he is, and he knows it," said the straightforward Miss Wilder. "You didn't perform such an operation by accident, Mr. Kirke."

"No; I have had a little practice, though only in cases of emergency like this."

She drew a long breath. "You are a perpetual surprise to me. You remember, Evelyn, we first knew him as a photographer, next we learned he was a lawyer, and now he turns out a surgeon."

Mr. Kirke set down his glass of iced tea in a slightly confused manner. "You make me out a Jack-at-all-trades, Miss Wilder; and, the worst of it is, there is some truth in it."

"But you have studied surgery?"

"Oh, no, only in a cursory way, as I've studied every thing else; though I admit it always took a stronger hold on me than my other studies, for I liked it better."

There was an inquiring look in Miss Searle's eyes, but she said nothing. What would she have liked to say? The conversation drifted now into a general discussion of medical science and the progress of ideas; Dr. Sangrado's name was brought up, the fabled physician who wrote in favor of the practice of bleeding, and declared "if he killed off all his patients, he must continue bleeding, for the credit of his book."

Mr. Kirke said that only forty years ago there was a loud cry against anesthetics; and when they were defended on the ground that Adam underwent a surgical operation in his sleep, the reply was, "Ah, but that was before sin entered the world!"

Miss Searle remarked that vaccination was bitterly opposed a century ago; and Miss Wilder said it was some time later that windmills were voted down in Scotland, because they were in league with Satan, the "prince of the powers of the air."

"I'll try to match that," said Ozro. "When they discovered the bones of those cave-men in France, they thought at first they were the remains of fallen angels."

"Well, we shouldn't have been wiser to-day than any of these people, if we had not been instructed," said Miss Searle softly: "so we needn't be proud of our knowledge. We didn't acquire it; we merely inherit it, you know, as an idle young man inherits his father's fortune."

"An idle young man." It was impossible to suspect the gentle girl of any covert meaning; but Mr. Kirke had a growing sensitiveness regarding his standing in Narransauc, which lent a sting to the words. Every man, woman, and child in the busy town seemed to be pointing a finger at him, metaphorically, and asking him what he was good for; and this imaginary question, so novel as well as perplexing, he was wholly unable to answer.

"Mr. Kirke," said Ozro after a pause, with a serious look which sat almost grotesquely on his merry face, "father and I have been having an argument to-

day, and I'd like your vote upon it. He says I ought to be choosing my profession now, this minute, before I leave college. Do you believe it?"

"That depends. What is your bias?"

"Bias? I haven't the sign of a bias; but when I say that to father, he thinks I'm a dunce. Now, I want to know if it's customary for fellows to have a bias. Did you know off-hand at my age what you wanted to be?"

"N-o-o."

"There, I told him so. I told him I'd warrant you'd had your time of dillydallying."

"Ah!"

"Yes. I don't know why I thought so, but I did."

"Perhaps, unfortunately, I don't remind you of Daniel Webster or Rufus Choate," said Mr. Kirke dryly.

"Oh, I don't mean any disrespect! I've no doubt you have great influence over a jury; only, from the way you spoke the other day, I thought perhaps you didn't take up law from any particular liking, you know. I thought you didn't seem very enthusiastic over it."

Mr. Kirke looked rather uncomfortable, though Ozro had spoken with a marked attempt at politeness. "The truth is, Mr. Searle, I have a partner who achieves all the enthusiasm for the firm, and all the business too: so any effort on my part is quite superfluous."

"Huzza! That's the very thing for me. Find me such a partner, will you? and I'll be a lawyer to-morrow."

Mr. Kirke shook his head, and replied very seriously, "There's nothing worse for a young man than to help

him too much at the start. It's like setting a baby on its feet before it's ready to walk."

"Oh, you needn't be concerned about my being propped up too much! There's no money in our family; and I've got to work my way along, every step of it," said Ozro with a wry face.

"I'm honestly glad to hear it, for it was the bane of my life that I wasn't obliged to work my way. There was a groove made for me; and I was set in it, and left to slip along on rollers."

"But you had some studying to do?"

"Oh, yes, now and then! But it is surprising how little study you can get on with, and pass the law."

Mr. Kirke had no intention of punning. The conversation was becoming unpleasantly personal; and Miss Wilder did not help him much when she fastened her searching eyes upon him, and said impressively, "Are you sure the law is your vocation, Mr. Kirke?"

"About as sure of it as I am of the color of the mud in the moon."

"Yet it was your choice?"

"I have not said so. If you remember, I just remarked that the choice was not mine. I merely accepted what stood ready for me."

"Pardon me," persisted Miss Wilder, "but you don't seem to me like the sort of person to do that. Now, I should have said you have a pretty strong will of your own."

"But can't you imagine my being too indolent to exert it?" returned Mr. Kirke, the color mounting to his brow with as keen a sense of shame as he had ever felt in his life.

What must these two working bees think of such a drone? And how easily he might have avoided convicting himself in their presence. Few young men would have considered such frankness necessary; but if Ben Kirke spoke of himself at all, it was always honestly, with a fine scorn of extenuation.

Miss Searle had been wishing for some time to come to his relief, and she now began to say something about the phœbes in the corner lot; but Ozro struck in with boyish obtuseness: "I say, Mr. Kirke, now, honestly, don't you believe you were cut out for a doctor?"

The question whizzed through the air like a bullet shot from a gun.

"Maybe I was. I confess I have often thought so, and that my going into the law was a mistake."

Miss Searle stooped to pick up her handkerchief. "It is not too late to correct the mistake, is it?" laughed she in a low, sweet tone, so close to his ear that no one else heard it.

She spoke carelessly, but the words electrified him. He raised his head quickly; and, as he looked at her, his eyes kindled. "Not too late." It came with the force of a conviction. How often he had vaguely wondered, especially of late, if he might not some time strike out in a new path, and be something more than a mere hanger-on upon Randall. But the thought had hardly taken definite shape before, as a question to be met face to face and decided once for all.

Miss Searle glided back easily now to the phœbes, and from them to the last novel, and the little tea-party broke up very pleasantly. But, as Mr. Kirke sought

his pillow that night, the words repeated themselves in his ear: "It is not too late too correct the mistake, is it?"

"Natures, like melodies, have their key-notes;" and the key-note of his nature had been struck. Had Evelyn done it unwittingly? For a transparent woman, she was sometimes hard to read. How much had she meant by these careless words? But the young man's heart responded, —

"No, it is not too late."

XII.

"God is ever drawing like toward like, and making them acquainted."

PLATO.

"IF he carries out this project, he has me to thank for it; though I'm sometimes afraid he considers me a prig," said Miss Wilder with a pained look in her eyes, as she stood before the hall mirror without looking into it, and energetically tied her bonnet-strings.

"Then he thinks the same of me," returned Evelyn, peeping over her friend's shoulder to see if her own bonnet was straight. The eyes of the two young ladies met in the glass.

"You? Oh, no, dear! You couldn't preach, to save your life. You only look at him wistfully, while I harangue; but did you think three weeks ago, when we had that lawn tea, that he would spring up so suddenly, and go to studying with Dr. Stone?"

"No; but he does not call it studying: he is only browsing among the doctor's books, he says," returned Evelyn, pinning a rose-geranium into her belt. "I do like these flowers that grow in clusters, bless their hearts, they have such a social look. — Ah, there he comes."

"Good-by, Rosa, we are gone," called out Theodate toward the kitchen; adding in an aside to Evelyn,

"I could wish Ozro might be left at home when we ride."

It is possible that Mr. Kirke had the same wish ; but of what avail the fourth seat in a carryall, if not occupied? And how can you exclude a boy who never waits for an invitation, but assumes that he is the life of the party, and even suspects that the party was made for him? Ozro was in the highest possible feather to-day, prepared to lead the conversation, as usual, for the relief of Mr. Kirke and the girls. He always studied Mr. Kirke's wishes in this regard, and was glad that he could make himself so useful to him ; for he was becoming completely enthralled by the large, indolent young man, who seemed so little self-centred, so careless of effect. He tried to copy Mr. Kirke's ringing laugh, his easy gestures, his very pleasant way of elevating his eyebrows ; and, as for his style of necktie, he would hit that off or perish in the attempt.

Mr. Kirke might not have been aware of this amiable weakness in Ozro ; but the young ladies had been quick to see and smile at it, though they allowed it to pass without comment. He was like Victor Hugo's flea, "full of good sentiments," and his talk was an intermittent play of fireworks. But, during a brief pause, Evelyn ventured to ask Mr. Kirke if he could tell her the meaning of a word which had puzzled her all the morning, — "honey-dew." "I am sure it is of Greek origin," said she, "but I cannot find it in any of our books on Grecian literature."

He tried to be politely serious, as he asked, "Have you looked in the English dictionary, Miss Searle?"

She bore with very good grace the laugh which followed, though Ozro from that time forth gave her little peace of her life. He didn't take stock in Greek, he said, had never read a Greek play, didn't know any thing particular about Grecian history; but he hoped he knew honey-dew. Would be pleased to show her some, if she'd condescend to look at any thing so common. Plenty in the wood; but she might prefer to go to Greece for it, etc.

"And now, Miss Searle," said Mr. Kirke, as she began to recover from her blushing confusion, "there's a word I'd like to have you define for me: it's drones' honey."

"Stop a minute. I didn't know they made it," cried Ozro.

"I saw that very word this morning, Mr. Kirke, when I was looking for the other one; but I can't tell you what it means."

"Where did you see it?"

"In Plato's 'Republic.' 'When a young man has tasted drones' honey' — I forget the rest. But farther on it says, 'And so the young man returns into the country of the lotus-eaters.'"

"Thank you, Miss Searle. I heard somebody use the word once, derisively, and I've wondered ever since where it came from." And then he added to himself, with an unconscious squaring of the shoulders, "It shall never be flung at me again. Drones' honey is bitter to the taste: I abjure it forever." For while he had no present intention of leaving Narransauc, the country of the lotus-eaters, persuading himself that he was actually needed here till Tom should get upon his

feet again, he had nevertheless decided to make a complete revolution on his return to Chicago, drop the law, and begin the study of medicine. True, he had wasted some valuable time; but a man at twenty-six is not yet old, and may still hope for better days. "Father will grind me to the earth for it, but I shall be more of a man under his heel than I am now as a figure-head in Randall's office. As for mother" — This was a sentence he had never been able to finish. He left it like a serial story, to be continued.

They were travelling over a pleasant road, bordered by white birches, willows, and alder-bushes, and were approaching a small white schoolhouse which stood blistering in the sun.

"I taught my first school here, — oh, so long ago!" said Miss Searle with a playful sigh.

"It was built near that birch grove, so it would be handy for her to send out after switches," explained Ozro to Mr. Kirke; "but, I'm sorry to say, she had to be fined for whipping the children too hard."

Here he fell into contortions of mirth at the absurdity of the idea.

"It was the summer before I met you, Theodate," continued Miss Searle, in a reminiscent tone. "I was a little girl of fifteen, and had just gone into long dresses, and was full of poetical fancies. I wonder if they've taken down a wreath of immortelles I hung on the wall. It was still there when I peeped in last year."

Unfortunate remark. Ozro at once seized the reins and stopped the horses, exclaiming, "Let her out, let her out." And, quite unexpectedly to themselves,

Miss Searle and Mr. Kirke were left standing together by the roadside ; while Ozro drove on at a furious rate with Miss Wilder, despite her threats and protestations. The situation was a trifle awkward for the deserted ones, though they made as merry over it as they could.

"At least, you can peep in at the window now," said Mr. Kirke, mentally wishing he had in his hand one of the birch switches Ozro had been discoursing of, and could apply it to his saucy young shoulders.

They did peep in through a very dirty window, and beheld for their pains an empty schoolroom, left an hour ago in rude disorder, and a smoke-stained wall, on which hung the ambitious, but dry and dusty, motto : *Ad astras*.

"There it is in its fadeless glory. What a silly child I was !" exclaimed Evelyn.

"What is it made of, — immortelles?"

"Yes ; and don't you detest them? Such juiceless flowers. Can you see why people should use them as an emblem of immortality?"

"No : they are a dreary mockery of it to me. They do not remind me of heaven, but of Nirvana," said Mr. Kirke, trying the window to see if he could raise it.

"Think of dragging out a stupefied, stifled eternity on a schoolhouse wall," said Evelyn. "Wouldn't you rather be a wholesome, homely hollyhock, to grow old and die when your time comes?"

"Perhaps so ; unless I were granted the consolation of being set up by you in Latin."

Evelyn laughed. "I wonder I did not try Hebrew or Sanscrit : it would have been still more imposing. Dear me ; how proud I felt, sitting in that desk after

school, stitching those letters on green cambric, with the children watching me, so full of awe, and wondering what it meant!"

"I can imagine it," said Mr. Kirke, "and the guilelessness of your face. They must have adored you for your humility as much as your learning. Will you give me that motto, Miss Searle?"

"Not if you laugh at it."

"Oh, I'm deeply serious! Here comes Ozro. — Why did you take the trouble to come back for us, Ozro? We hoped you would be kind enough to let us walk home," said Mr. Kirke, debating in his own mind the feasibility of taking the lad one side at the first opportunity, and giving him a wholesome shaking. But, when Evelyn and Ozro reached the carriage, Mr. Kirke was not to be seen. He had gone around to the back side of the schoolhouse, climbed in at the open window, and was capturing the coveted wreath of immortelles.

"It is mine, is it not?" said he, emerging with it in his hand, and flipping the dust from it as he held it up to Miss Searle's view.

"Why should it be yours? Did I give it to you?"

"Possibly not, in so many words; but I have it by right of possession, you see," entering the carriage and coolly taking up the reins.

"To the robber belong the spoils," said Miss Wilder. "But perhaps you'll tell us what you want to do with this elegant trophy, Mr. Kirke."

"Oh, merely to hang it up in my room at the Druid, and admire it for its modest worth!"

"A clear case of spoons," whispered Ozro behind his hand to Miss Wilder, in a tone so audible that it

was only by a lucky accident that Mr. Kirke did not hear it.

Miss Wilder made no response, but looked thoughtfully at Evelyn's flushed and annoyed face, then at her own folded hands, and remained silent for some time.

The next evening had been appointed for a row on the river; and when they were all four seated in the boat, advancing quietly up stream, Mr. Kirke said, turning to Miss Searle, "Do you know, my conscience has been pricking me all day for that theft of yesterday."

"Do you mean the motto? I am glad you have a conscience, Mr. Kirke."

"But, you see, I don't intend to give up such a fine piece of workmanship after the great risk I ran to get it."

"Then your repentance is not genuine."

"Oh, yes, it is! I long to make reparation; but can you expect me to give up that motto, when I need it for my moral improvement?"

"What's your reparation?" asked Ozro.

Mr. Kirke produced something from his pocket, which he placed in Miss Searle's hand. "A curious stone I found last summer in Dakota, or that a friend of mine found, who was with me."

She made an exclamation of delighted surprise, as her eye fell upon it. It was a moss agate, about an inch long and half an inch wide, with a pictured surface, so truly and cunningly fashioned by Nature that it seemed a perfect work of art. It was a castle with three towers, and a low wall in the rear, while beyond

was a sea-line distinctly defined. The castle was seated on the brow of a promontory; the view down the side, in the foreground, broken into two distinct lines of road, leading to the gates. All this in a combination of colors so striking and beautiful, that it was hard to believe it a work of chance.

"You are only jesting with us, Mr. Kirke. Now, confess that some one painted this stone," said Miss Wilder, as it passed under her inspection.

"Upon my word, it has only been cleansed and polished."

"O Ozro, do be careful!" said Evelyn, as the lad plunged the agate into the water and brought it up dripping.

"Did you suppose I was going to let it fall? There, take it, if you think I can't be trusted," dropping it into her palm.

After another admiring look at the stone, Miss Searle gave it back with a word of thanks to Mr. Kirke.

"Why do you return it? It is not mine; that is, if you will condescend to accept it."

"You did not really intend to give this to me?" exclaimed Evelyn, in some embarrassment.

"Oh, no! It's merely a barter. I hoped you might accept it in exchange for the wreath."

"But this stone is so rare," said she, looking up at him with a smile of hesitation.

"So is the motto."

"But the motto is not valuable."

"Why not, if I prize it?"

"I am on his side there, Evelyn," said Ozro, fear-

ful of being left out of the conversation. "He knows what they are both worth to him, and you'd better take the stone at his valuation."

"It isn't fair to tempt me," replied Evelyn, turning instinctively toward Theodate, who had said nothing, but was regarding her with a sidewise look hard to interpret.

"I think the gnomes intended this for one of your sisters," added Evelyn; "'twould make her such a pretty brooch."

Mr. Kirke bowed very soberly, and deposited the bone of contention in his breast-pocket with a slightly offended air, which did not augur well for any future benevolence toward either of his sisters.

Miss Wilder roused herself with an effort: "Now, Evelyn, you don't know but he will lose the stone before he reaches Chicago. How could you let such a beautiful thing go out of your hands?"

Miss Scarle laughed lightly, thinking perhaps she had made an undue difficulty over a trifle. Mr. Kirke saw his advantage, and was not slow to press it: so it came to pass that the beautiful moss agate, half against her will, went over to Evelyn's possession.

This episode, trifling in itself, made a marked impression upon Miss Wilder, who sat looking silently down at the dark water. "Where doves are, doves come," thought she. Gifts were always showering upon Evelyn, unsought. Her friends seemed of one mind in their desire to enrich her, as if unable to deny themselves so great a pleasure. Miss Wilder did not expect such offerings herself, nor had she any mean envy of her more popular friend. She was not thinking now so

much of Mr. Kirke's gift, as of the soulful earnestness that went with it.

"Where doves are, doves come," she repeated, gazing steadfastly into the water. "To him that hath shall be given; and I charge you to remember, Theodate Wilder, that it is all of the Lord. He offers to one a full cup, to another a scanty drop; to one a sweet draught, to another a bitter potion; and who is he that replieth against the Lord?"

"What do you see down there?" asked Ozro, leaning his head on his arm and staring down too, while the iridescent drops trickled from his suspended oar.

Theodate made a laughing reply, not liking her friends to think her dull. It chanced, however, that Evelyn was thinking very little about her at that moment; and as for Mr. Kirke, she might have fallen asleep, with her head inclining over the boat, without attracting his attention. If an instantaneous photograph could have been taken of the minds of the party, the record might have read somewhat as follows:—

Miss Wilder (sadly but resolutely): "Well, I have to accept myself as I am: I can't make one hair white or black."

Mr. Kirke (delighted): "How gracefully she yielded at last! I'd be perfectly happy if it had been a set of turquoise."

Miss Searle (fluttered): "I think I never saw a young man with just that manner, so deferential and courtly. There is certainly a charm in such a manner."

Ozro (flippantly): "There ought to be an asylum for lovers. How much I stood from Fiske, and now

here's Kirke! Hope I haven't got to follow 'em round all summer; but they seem to expect it."

"What wonderful shadows those trees give!" said Miss Wilder, breaking the silence.

"Almost tangible, as if you had only to put out your hand and grasp them," said Miss Searle. "The illusion is very much like those memories of the past that come before us with such tantalizing vividness sometimes, — the beautiful past, though it is out of our reach forever."

"But you wouldn't live it over if you could, Evelyn."

"Indeed I would."

"Then it is just possible you may," remarked Mr. Kirke with a mysterious smile from under his hat-brim.

"Please explain."

"Why, the past is somewhere, Miss Searle. It is not gone, — that is, not gone out of the universe, — is it?"

She regarded him with a puzzled look.

"Events that are quite forgotten on earth may be just looming up to view on one of the fixed stars, you know."

"Provided they have suitable telescopes," struck in Ozro.

"Well, but what have we to do with the fixed stars?" asked Evelyn.

"Nothing, as yet; but we may have a good deal to do with them ages hence. They may be our future homes, for aught we know," replied Mr. Kirke, who enjoyed watching her face as a new idea swept swiftly over it.

"Oh, I understand! We may look down from those awful spaces on this 'wild balloon,' the earth, and see what happened a thousand years ago, as if it were passing now. It will have just reached us. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm in for it," said Ozro. "Is that original, Mr. Kirke?"

"No," with a strong stroke of the oar. "I believe the theory was offered forty years ago by some fanciful Englishman."

"At any rate, it opens up a vista of strange speculation," said Evelyn dreamily. "Maybe the ideal is just a hint of light from the future: who knows?"

"However that may be, I think we might get a good moonlight view from the top of this hill," suggested Theodate. "Suppose we land and try it."

They beached their boat and sauntered up the bank, Ozro wondering that Theodate should seize upon his arm before he thought of offering it; amused, too, by the deferential manner in which Mr. Kirke assisted his agile cousin, who never needed any help in climbing a hill when she walked with *him*.

"I'm getting tired of this," thought the boy, yawning. "Theodate doesn't take the least pains to interest me, and here are the other two dropping their voices sometimes so that I can hardly catch a word. They'd better be careful, or I shall cut them entirely."

XIII.

*"Will thou mix hellebore, who dost not know
How many grains should to the mixture go?"*

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IT was the third day of a hearty rain, which, as Mr. Crabtree said, "had broken the drouth, and would prove an excellent thing for the fall feed." It was Sunday evening, dark and gusty, and the lamps had been lighted early at Violet Hill. There was also a small fire upon the hearth, sending up playful tongues of flame, as if not more than half in earnest, but meaning it chiefly for good cheer and fellowship. Miss Searle had not been quite well for a few days; but now, declaring herself "much better of her poorliness," had donned her white wrapper, and was seated in the Elizabethan chair, with her little slippered feet upon the brass fender, looking, so Rosa declared, "very saintish indeed." Miss Wilder had been reading to the invalid from Longfellow's "Golden Legend;" but now both the young ladies were chatting in low, pleasant tones, while Miss Searle held in her hand a bunch of nasturtiums, and picked off one by one their orange hoods. The kitchen-door was ajar; and they could hear the faint "under-song" of the tea-kettle, mingled with the monotonous sound of Rosa's voice as she read aloud to herself a letter from Peter, who had gone to

Bangor to buy a horse for his master. Rosa could never "sense" either a written or a printed page unless she read the words audibly.

"Nature has been rather economical with that child in the way of brains," remarked Miss Wilder, rising to close the door.

"She is very proud of Peter's letter," said Miss Searle, "and admitted to me to-day that she 'likes him quite well;' though how much that means, I'm sure I don't know."

"Nor does she know, poor thing. Isn't love always a puzzle?" returned Miss Wilder, picking up a brand and laying a fresh stick on the fire before she took her seat again.

"Yet love is supposed to be a necessity of a woman's life," said Miss Searle, watching the leaping flames dreamily.

"Can you call it a necessity, dear, when so many women live without it?"

"I suppose not; they get on so very comfortably, too."

"Yes, apparently," said Miss Wilder, rising again and going to the window. "I believe this is the clearing-off shower. A love that is perfect and satisfying, Evelyn, do you believe it is common?"

"Oh, no! Nothing perfect is common in this world. Doesn't it seem as if half the married people we see are making pitiful attempts to keep up appearances? But then," added Evelyn with sudden humility, "what do you and I know about it, who only look on from the outside, — we, the unchosen ones?"

"We, the unchosen ones! The sweet little hypo-

crite," thought Miss Wilder grimly. Then aloud, "Evelyn, when I think of Joe Fiske, and how he tried to call you down to him, I have no patience with his presumption. But if some one else, if" —

It was not common for Miss Wilder to talk so disjointedly; and Miss Searle asked, "What do you mean, Theodate?" as the sentence still hung in the air.

"I believe it is this howling wind that makes me so nervous," said Miss Wilder. "I hope I don't remind you of that partially insane lawyer we were talking of yesterday, who felt constrained to whirl around three times before he could sign his name."

Here she sprang up, and set her chair against the wall. "But what I was trying to say was this"—Another pause. "If the time should ever come, Evelyn, when you feel that some one else is more to you than I, let all our protestations be forgotten, let them die like empty breath."

"Why, Theodate, what has come over you? I've certainly given you no cause to say any thing like this," protested Evelyn, grieved and amazed. But the light falling on her face showed it curiously disturbed: her mouth trembled, and there was a flash of some sort of fire in her eyes. Was it the fire of righteous indignation?

That she considered herself indignant, there could be no reasonable doubt. It was unjust and unkind in Theodate to speak to her in this way. What had she ever said or done which could be construed into disloyalty to this dearest and best of friends? If Theodate meant Mr. Kirke as the "some one else" who might possibly come between them, — and Evelyn

would not pretend, even to herself, that she did not mean Mr. Kirke, — why, it was certainly most indelicate in Theodate. A comparative stranger, a man whom neither of them had seen or heard of two months ago. A friendly person, to be sure ; an agreeable companion, who had made the summer very pleasant for them both, but who would go home and forget them, and probably never set foot in Narransauc again.

“ O Theodate, you have wounded me to the heart ! ” said Evelyn, pinching the pungent nasturtiums together, and casting them into the fire.

Theodate sheathed her sharp eyes, and turned away. She would not embarrass her friend by seeming to watch her face ; nor had she, indeed, the moral courage for her own sake to look at it ; for a feeling of dread was upon her, almost as if the curtain which hides the future were about to rise.

“ Well,” thought she, “ I did not do it well ; but it is done. I have said all I meant to say, and now I’ll leave the subject with her.”

This was Mr. Marsh’s favorite remark after an exhortation ; and at that moment the mellow sound of the church-bell fell upon her ear, reminding her of the evening meeting, which she had not thought of attending. But now the wild impulse came upon her to flee abroad, and breast the storm ; for to remain within doors seemed intolerable. “ Evelyn, dear, if I’ve been talking nonsense, it’s because I’ve been in the house all day, and that always makes me morbid, you know : so now, even if it does rain a little, I believe I’d better go to church.”

“ Why, Theodate, it pours.”

But she had already gone to the kitchen to look for the lantern; and Evelyn knew better than to waste words on the strong-minded young lady, when her resolve was once fixed.

“‘My bonnie wee croodlin doo’,” said Theodate, setting down the lighted toy-lantern on the hearth, and going up to Evelyn with a face full of motherly tenderness, tinged with a little remorse, “you look pale and worn. I know you’ll be easier and quieter all alone. Go straight to bed, won’t you, dear.”

“Yes, I will. Was there any medicine to be taken to-night?”

“To be sure. How could I have forgotten?” said Theodate, fastening her gossamer with fingers that trembled from suppressed excitement. “Affection is the sweetest blessing the Lord has to bestow; and who am I, to demand the best gifts? All there is for us in this twilight world is to trust and be quiet,” said she to herself over and over, as a sort of panacea for heartache, while she went to the little medicine-closet, called the end cupboard, for Evelyn’s powders.

It was time to be starting for church; the way was long, and the walking execrable: but it would not have occurred to Theodate that any one but herself could perform this little office for Evelyn. “Here, darling,” said she, re-appearing in the parlor with cup, spoon, and glass of water, which she set on the mantel. “I am getting it all ready for you; but you needn’t take it till the last minute, just as you go to bed. Now, don’t forget.”

“No, I’ll not forget,” replied Evelyn languidly, feeling her own health to be a matter of supreme indif-

ference since she had given it unreservedly into the hands of this competent keeper. Theodate detested drugs, and disapproved of Dr. Stone, yet very inconsistently allied herself with the enemy by always administering his doses; though she did it under a vigorous protest, which served to ease her own conscience of the burden of responsibility.

"There, I'm afraid I shall be late. Good-by, dear. Be asleep before I come home," said she, dropping a light kiss upon her friend's pale cheek, as she rushed out of the room with impetuous haste. No one ever called Miss Wilder "nervous." It was the last word that seemed appropriate to a person of her remarkable repose of manner. But there were times, as now, when an acute observer might have seen in her face a tense look, as if she were holding turbulent emotions in leash, and dared not relax her grasp for an instant.

"I send my shout into the abyss, and no answer comes back," said she to herself; yet her lips were dumb, and she seemed to be pursuing her way in utter calmness against the rain, which was pouring diagonally from the north-east, when not diverted by sudden gusts to the west and south.

Mr. Kirke stood by the parlor window of the hotel, gazing out into space. The night had shut down intensely dark in the tree-shaded village street; and he could see absolutely nothing except for the few lanterns which winked sleepily here and there, revealing glimpses of the men who carried them, and of the mud and water they were wading through.

"That lady looks very familiar to me," thought he, watching a lonely figure making its difficult way down

the street. A sudden gleam of light fell upon her pale, resolute face. It was Miss Wilder. What had called her out in this storm? He remembered then that the bell had rung for church, and exclaiming, "I'm going with her," rushed for hat and umbrella, glad of any sort of diversion, even in the teeth of the tempest, after two hours' attendance on cross Tom. Miss Wilder was glad to see him, or said she was.

"What a long, long, weary day it has been! I staid at home reading till my mind feels perfectly extinguished, like the clinkers in old coal," said she, accepting Mr. Kirke's arm, and yielding him the lantern. She was nearly breathless with her long, hard buffet against the wind, and it was a relief to know she would not have to return alone.

"How is Miss Searle?"

"Better, in spite of Dr. Stone."

"What, she has not been ill enough to consult him?" The tone was so full of real concern that Theodate wondered to herself mischievously how the young man would bear it to be told that Evelyn's case had been considered grave enough to call for some of the strongest drugs. He did not know, perhaps, that it was Dr. Stone's way to resort to them on the slightest provocation.

"Do you approve of Dr. Stone?" she asked abruptly.

"I hardly know him. He is kind enough to allow me a corner in his office, to look over his books; but he is seldom there himself."

"I am glad of that, for he might contaminate you with some of his obsolete notions; but his books are

probably no worse than other people's. I think you are pretty brave," she added, "to take up this new study simply because you were made for it. That is going straight to the heart of things in a way people in general won't understand. What do you suppose they will say to you for dropping a certainty for an uncertainty?"

"They will say precisely what they please, Miss Wilder; they usually do."

"Then you don't care. I thought you wouldn't."

"The hardest foes I shall have to meet will be those of my own household," pursued the young man, with a pugnacious clutch of the umbrella handle; "especially my father, who will be likely to cut me off with a shilling."

"Do you mean it, Mr. Kirke?"

"Yes; I shall be greatly surprised otherwise. He has always wished to order my life for me. He has never learned the art of letting me alone."

Miss Wilder was struck by the hardness of the tone. The words seemed almost to come through closed teeth.

"Did you ever hear of 'malignant kindness'?" he asked with a forced laugh. "Yet he is one of the best of men. The truth is, I am the only son, and have been a means of discipline to him all along. The hold he has had on me has been entirely through my mother, and he knows it."

There was a long pause. "When I am a famous physician, Miss Wilder, with a trans-Atlantic reputation, you will remember that I owe it to you and Miss Searle."

"Yes, I'll remember," said she, wondering rather bitterly what Miss Searle had had to do with it. It was she alone who had spoken to him on the subject, yet this he seemed entirely to forget. And why should she care? He was not the only person who had felt her influence without recognizing it, nor was this the first time she had been dropped out of notice where Evelyn was concerned.

"Evelyn is a sun, and all things revolve around her; while I am only a moon, shining by reflected light, and giving no warmth that one perceives. Ah, well, the moon has her quiet use, for all that, her small place in the universe; I hope the insignificant creature knows and is glad she can control the tides, whether the ocean ever thanks her for it or not."

It was with these and similar reflections, by no means appropriate to the time and occasion, that a little later on Miss Wilder sat in church looking over the hymn-book with Mr. Kirke. It was a wild impulse that had sent her forth that evening, and the turbulence had not yet subsided; but ah, if she had known what was passing all the while at Violet Hill!

Aunt Ann Searle was sitting quietly in her library reading, her husband reclining on the sofa, the rest of the family chatting in the parlor; when Rosa burst in, wringing her hands, and crying out to them both to go home with her and see what had happened to Miss Evelyn. In trying to come out of her room a few moments before, she had fallen to the floor insensible; and Rosa, all alone with her in the house, had dragged her back to her bed, and managed to lift her upon it.

"Where is Mr. Ozro? Send him for the doctor,

and you come quick. Come, come, come," wailed Rosa, clutching at Mr. Searle's dressing-gown, as if her entreaties were needed to move him. And, though he and his wife set forth in all possible haste, the girl lingered not a moment, but saying, "I'm going for Miss Date," darted headlong into the darkness.

When the Searles reached Violet Hill, they found Evelyn lying where Rosa had left her, utterly senseless, but with a flushed face and fearfully labored breath. Several of the neighbors were in the house, having been startled by the incessant screams of Rosa, as she tore madly down the hill. No less than three boys had been despatched for Dr. Stone, and one for Dr. Cargill of Latium; and meanwhile all was confusion. Everybody was running up or down stairs, begging of somebody else to be told what to do.

"A hot foot-bath and hot soapstones!" cried one. "It is apoplexy."

"No, no! Fan her, fan her! It's syncope," cried another.

"Oh, wake her! do wake her!" begged a third. "It's catalepsy."

"You're all wrong," said her uncle, with glaring eyes bent upon the lifeless figure: "it's *poison*."

Horrible words! Absurd! Incredible! Yet Mr. Searle had no sooner spoken, than a conviction flashed on every mind that he was right. A cup, spoon, and glass stood upon a light stand near the bed, till this moment quite unnoticed. But now all eyes were turned to these mute objects; they had suddenly assumed a terrible significance. Wild thoughts surged through the brains of Mrs. Crabtree, Mrs. Simpson, and

old Mrs. Putnam, which they would not have uttered aloud for worlds. Thoughts like these :—

“ Could Theodate have done it? She had such a dark complexion, almost like an Indian. She loved Evelyn as she did her life, or pretended to: how did you know? Or there might have been a quarrel. But, oh, to think of it, killing her friend and benefactor, the beautiful, innocent Evelyn, and then running away! Her running away was certainly very much against her.”

“ I suppose this is her regular medicine?” spoke up aunt Ann Searle, taking the cup in her hand, and holding it critically to the light. “ Theodate will be here in a few minutes, and then we shall know what it was. There has been some frightful mistake.”

“ Where *is* the doctor?” cried one and another. “ If he should be laid up now, I’d never forgive him.”

There were one or two medical works in the library; and Mr. Searle and Mr. Crabtree seized upon them as a forlorn hope, turning to this, that, and the other antidote for poison. But which antidote would meet this unknown case? Had she swallowed opium, strychnine, or arsenic. Who could tell? And would the doctor *ever* come?

Hot and cold remedies were applied, and the windows raised. The patient was kept constantly in motion. There was no change, except that the breath seemed farther drawn and more difficult.

Would the doctor *never* come?

Yes; here he was at last, driving up with desperation. Long as the delay had seemed, he had wasted not a moment on the road, though none of the messengers had told a coherent story. He had not the

usual appliance for poison, — a stomach-pump, — and had telephoned to Latium for one.

“I know no more than the rest of you what has been given to her,” said the old doctor with dreadful candor, “and I can’t say whether I’m too late or not; but all of you leave the room but the Searles. We will do what we can with hypodermic injections of brandy; and God help us.”

The neighbors, their number constantly increasing, paced the rooms down-stairs, their hearts sinking again; for Dr. Stone’s manner, far from re-assuring, had filled them with even deeper despair. “That dear girl, that sweet girl, — oh, we can’t let her die!” And one woman related to another, with falling tears, some story of Evelyn’s wonderful goodness to her or hers, which rendered it highly improbable to her own mind that so angelic a being would be permitted to die.

“Oh, but she’s wanted in heaven, you may depend upon it; and that’s what frightens me!” said the timid dressmaker, wiping her eyes.

“We don’t know any thing about that: it’s the Lord’s business,” said the milliner, in a rebuking whisper; for no one ventured to speak aloud.

“Well, the Lord doesn’t willingly afflict the children of men; I pin my faith on that,” said Mrs. Crabtree with an outburst of sunny piety, clouded immediately by the darker views of Mrs. Putnam, who reminded her that the Lord moves in a mysterious way. “Didn’t he allow Lincoln to be assassinated, and Garfield?”

Here Miss Wilder’s voice sounded in the hall, as she rushed in, in advance of Mr. Kirke. No one had ever seen her face otherwise than colorless before; but now

it was deeply flushed, even to the eyeballs, which seemed on fire with inward heat.

"What is it? Where is she?" she cried. "Get me the box." And on she sped breathless through the crowd, which made way for her; and reaching the mantel, on which stood the little box of powders, she seized upon the box in a sort of fury. "Gray powders, white powders; look quick, Mr. Kirke, for Heaven's sake, quick. *Is there a gray powder in that box?*"

She spoke with great difficulty, her hand pressed upon her side. Mr. Kirke opened the papers one by one; there were three of them, of equal size. "These are all white," applying one to his tongue; "I think they are calomel."

"Then I gave her the atropine," gasped Theodate with a dry sob, clutching Mr. Kirke fiercely by the arm. "I have killed her! I'm a murderer! I've killed her!"

"Hush, child. There, there; hush, child. Who knows but we can save her yet?" said Mr. Kirke soothingly.

He understood it all. She had explained on their way home that a paper of atropine had been lying on the cupboard shelf, from which she sometimes gave Evelyn minute doses; and to-night she had inadvertently taken up the atropine first, but immediately returned it, as she supposed, to the shelf. She remembered her own agitation, her impatience to be gone; no doubt, in her haste, she had put the atropine into the box,—there must have been at least half a grain of it,—and out of the four papers lying there, Evelyn had chosen the fatal one. Theodate was aware of the deadly nature of the drug; she knew there was small hope of the dear girl's life.

XIV.

"The less hope, the more faith."

KINGSLEY.

"The greatest prayer is patience."

BUDDHA.

THEODATE flew up-stairs with Mr. Kirke. Thank God, there was a sound of breathing yet! With a cry of, "Oh, my love, my blessed dear!" she threw herself on the bed beside her friend, clasping her with both arms, and pressing her hot face against the senseless cheek.

Yet she lost not a word or motion of the dark group about the bed. She heard Mr. Kirke's word "belladonna," and the doctor's rapid question, "Do you know what you say?"

"Yes; have you tried the antidote, morphine?"

"No, good heavens! I've been working in the dark. Is there morphine in the house, liquid morphine?"

"There is," replied Miss Wilder, flying out of the room and returning with a little phial, thankful for once that the end cupboard contained a murderous drug. There was silence as Dr. Stone carefully measured out a portion of the liquid into the tiny silver syringe and applied it to her arm. Then in an excited tone to Mr. Kirke,—

"If my stomach-pump had only been in order!

I depend on Dr. Cargill to bring one; and I give him half an hour, from the start, to get here."

"And what if he should fail us?" thought Theodate, her glance sweeping by Dr. Stone, and resting with fearful eagerness upon Mr. Kirke. The young man was gazing intently at the mute figure hovering unconsciously between the two worlds. His expression was one of deep solemnity and awe; but, beyond that, Theodate could read nothing. His face was on guard, and evidently he did not mean to meet her eye. But even from this very neutrality and reticence, Theodate gathered a faint hope.

"All is not over, or he would give some sign. He could not look like that, for he loves her," she thought.

"Brandy," said Dr. Stone, in a low, sharp tone.

And aunt Ann, with steady hand, refilled the tiny syringe; then resumed the monotonous motion of the fan. Not for an instant had she or her husband or the doctor remitted their arduous efforts; yet Dr. Stone, who stood sentinel over the patient's pulse, could see no improvement.

"A little quieter just now, breathing easier," had been the answer once or twice to the messengers who came to the door. But there was despair in Dr. Stone's eye, as he motioned Mr. Kirke to come forward and apply his finger to the delicate wrist. It was then, perhaps, that the full terror of the situation was revealed to the young man. How could blood course through mortal veins with such terrible speed? It was like the mad rush of a swollen cataract, like the inconceivable velocity of globes of fire-mist whirling through space. And then suddenly, without the slightest warn-

ing, the infuriated tide would come to a dead stop, freezing his heart with terror; till just as suddenly it would begin again its frightful race. The speed was actually increasing, the respiration growing less frequent, unconsciousness more profound, the face assuming a deeper hue of purple.

"Is there a chance?" asked the doctor, turning to his student with an appealing look which would have been absurd at a less serious moment, but was now appalling, as it implied that his own skill was exhausted, and all hope gone unless this young tyro, who had not yet learned the alphabet of medical science, might perchance by a lucky hit evolve some scheme for saving the dying girl.

For a second Mr. Kirke stood speechless, while the eyes of all the four attendants were fastened upon him by a common impulse, as if on his untried skill, his mere mother-wit, hung the momentous issue. "Try oxygen," said he tentatively.

"Oxygen?"

"Yes. I brought a rubber bag of it to your office yesterday, ready for use. Shall I go, or you?"

"I. Do you take my place," exclaimed the doctor with a flash of reviving hope, and hurried down-stairs to his gig.

It was easier to go than to stay.

After this, until his return, the minutes were hours. Theodate held the fan, and waved it incessantly, though scarcely taking her eyes from the little lever-clock on the mantel, whose minute hand seemed partially paralyzed, scarcely able to creep around its narrow circle.

The storm had ceased; the moon was breaking through the clouds, and now looked in at the window dispassionately, like the Brahmin's god, to whom life and death are equal. Mr. Kirke had assumed Dr. Stone's place, holding the same strict watch over the patient's pulse,—as if watching could avail!—and uttering no word beyond the occasional demand for brandy or morphine. What were his thoughts, none could tell. But once or twice a convulsive shudder crept over him; and great beaded drops gathered, and fell unheeded from his brow.

In the deep, awful hush of that room, God knew that every breath of those waiting friends was a fervent prayer. In Benjamin Kirke's soul, the prayer took the form of a vow: "Strong Son of God, immortal Love, give back this waning breath, and I vow my life to thee."

"Be merciful to me a sinner," implored Theodate, with the anguish of unspeakable remorse.

If Evelyn should die, could she, a murderer, permit herself to live? She thought of the stern old Romans, who had not scrupled to seek death for a far lighter cause than hers would be; and then she rebelled wildly against the Christianity which would not permit her to court the same relief.

The sound of wheels broke the silence.

Dr. Cargill entered the chamber with a delusive look of wisdom which gave a moment's hope. But, alas, he had not brought the expected instrument! He had come all the way from Latium to say that it was broken, and that he did not know what could possibly be done without it.

He was deeply regretful, adjusted his spectacles thoughtfully, looked at the patient, and, not forgetting to be technical, pronounced the deep color "cyanotic;" but this, which was all he could do, was but idle mockery to the watchers by that bed. And Theodate, in the midst of her anguish, was stirred by a dull feeling of impatience and contempt.

Yet the man was certainly not to blame. He fell in at once with the idea of the oxygen experiment. It was worth trying, he said; though, as a conscientious physician, he would hold out no assurance of success.

By the time Dr. Stone returned with the apparatus, Evelyn's respirations were only four to the minute. She was so evidently sinking that the two physicians exchanged solemn glances, which seemed to say, "It is a foregone conclusion; still we will administer the oxygen, to satisfy the friends."

"How long will it be before we can see any effect?" asked Theodate; her glance, as usual, ignoring the doctors and resting on Mr. Kirke.

"At least an hour," was his reply.

Theodate hurried out of the room. She could bear this slow torture no longer. On the stairs she found Rosa, who was hysterical unless kept busy, and appointed her a messenger to hear and report every five minutes the progress of the experiment.

"No worse, a bit better," were the bulletins. Later: "They can't tell till midnight. If she's alive then" — And again the girl broke into wild laughter.

Midnight came at last. Theodate had been standing in the hall a quarter of an hour watching the tall eight-day clock, which had always seemed like a living

presence in the house, and which Evelyn wound every Sunday morning as regularly as the morning came. To-day, perhaps for the first time since her father's death, she had forgotten her task; and, though the ticking of the clock still went on, it was growing every moment fainter, — or was this Theodate's fancy? And now on the stroke of twelve it hesitated, caught its breath, seemed undecided whether to finish ringing out the hour or to relapse into silence. Theodate listened with a superstitious thrill. "If it stops now, there is no hope for Evelyn," she said to herself, and began with nervous haste to wind up the striking-weight. The faithful old clock rallied, new life inspired its lungs; and clearly, distinctly, with no uncertain sound, it rang out nine, ten, eleven, *twelve*, every note a peal of joy to Theodate's heart.

"Alive yet, but very weak. If she can possibly survive till two o'clock, we may hope," was now the message from little Rosa, too worn out and perplexed for either laughter or tears.

Hope! "Despair is a free man, Hope is a slave," says the Koran, that strange medley of Judaism and Christianity: meaning probably that real Despair is not tortured by fluctuations, but lies stern and silent in the darkness; while Hope creeps in, timid and faltering, afraid of its own shadow.

Theodate went up-stairs now, dragging the chain of Hope. Still that group of waiting figures about the bed, silent save when some low order was issued by one of the doctors. Two o'clock.

"Alive yet, thanks to the Searle constitution," cried Dr. Stone radiantly.

"She has a nature of extraordinarily high potency, or it would not have responded so readily," said Dr. Cargill, indulging himself in grand words, which irritated nobody, for nobody listened.

All were watching the patient. Her respiration was almost normal now, her natural color gradually returning. She made an ineffectual effort to open her eyes, and soon fell into a quiet, refreshing slumber.

"Please the Lord, she's going to pull through," said Mrs. Crabtree, who stood by the kitchen table pouring her husband a cup of coffee, with something that almost dared to be a smile. But the next bulletin was less favorable. "Be not too sanguine," said Dr. Stone, appearing in the kitchen at three o'clock for a little needed refreshment. "She has had a sinking attack quite unexpectedly, and another may occur and prove fatal."

From that time till five, however, the news was invariably good. In another half hour she had moaned, — joyful sound from lips that seemed closed forever, — had fully opened her eyes and gazed around. Life and partial consciousness were returning to the benumbed brain; and Dr. Stone called Miss Wilder out of the room, and announced to her with much feeling that Evelyn was now out of danger.

"That is, with proper care," he added cautiously, as if that could dishearten Theodate, or as if she needed to be reminded of her duty.

She made no reply to the doctor in words; but her eloquent face said plainly enough, —

"Don't you know I would lay down my life for my friend? Have you lost faith in me because of my care-

lessness? Then so be it, good sir; but my own conscience stabs deeper than your words."

"Don't let her be excited. Don't tell her of the belladonna. Lie to her, if necessary, but keep her calm."

It may be that Dr. Stone was not unwilling to lecture Miss Wilder. He had always considered her rather "strong-minded;" and it is possible, too, that he owed her a grudge for her slighting opinion of his medical skill.

"I will remember," said Theodate, her eyes sinking under his glance.

The neighbors all went to their several homes, rejoicing; and aunt Ann, with the help of the joyful and partially sane Rosa, had prepared an early breakfast for the family.

Theodate went back to the chamber to summon Mr. Searle and Mr. Kirke; but the latter would not leave his post beside the patient, who had fallen again into a natural sleep.

"Very well," replied Theodate, dropping into a chair by the window.

He had certainly saved Evelyn's life; and, if he wished to be the first person she should see on awakening, who could wonder at it or deny him the privilege? Not Theodate, humbled as she was by remorse.

"He would stand all day with that ecstatic look on his face, and never know he was tired; and yet he is no happier than I. That is impossible. If I ever forget the mercies of this night, may the Father above forget me!"

The sleeper stirred slightly. At that moment it

occurred to Theodate that Mr. Kirke should have been sent away. How disastrous it might be if Evelyn should waken to her full reason and find him there! But it was too late now. She had opened her eyes, blazing with unearthly splendor, but full of a strange pathos impossible to describe. It was almost like the startled, hunted look of some beautiful wild creature pursued by its enemies. She gazed first at Mr. Kirke in surprised recognition, as if vaguely wondering how he happened there, though hardly caring to know. And Theodate, why was she sitting in that chair, looking like a phantom in a dream?

It was of no importance, however. Phantoms are not worth regarding. All one has to do is to close one's eyes, and they will quietly steal away. Nothing was of real interest to Evelyn except a peculiar sensation of dryness in her tongue, a most absorbing experience. It seemed to fill her whole being, and leave no room for any other thought or emotion. Possibly there was a remedy, if she could only think what it was.

Yes, she remembered now: it was water. It would be a great effort to speak the word, but she must try. Instantly, as her lips began to move, Mr. Kirke had raised her head with the utmost gentleness, and was bending over her with a glass of cold water, fresh from the ancestral well. Nothing was ever like it. Was it gold and silver and diamonds, all fused together in one delicious draught? Or did it come straight from the Pierian Spring? Only there was not enough of it; there never could be enough. Though all the precious things in the world should flow forever over her tongue, still she should forever thirst.

She thought she would say this to Mr. Kirke, it was something so very strange ; and then it occurred to her that it would be unkind. He had probably taken infinite pains to provide a nectar worthy of the gods ; and, unsatisfactory though it was, she must be grateful.

“Thank you,” said she, looking up at him, and summoning a smile which would have repaid him a thousand-fold if he had dissolved his whole fortune for her in that brimming glass.

“It is good,” said she sweetly ; and then truth, crushed to earth, rose again, as she added with a piteous sigh, —

“But it does no good. I want it always, — more, more, more !”

Theodate came forward now ; she could not help it. But Mr. Kirke need not have held up a warning finger. She knew enough to keep back the tide of joy from her face ; she could manage her looks at least as well as he did, — the beaming, blissful, beatified wretch ! She spoke to Evelyn calmly, almost playfully ; kissed her cheek, drew up the silken coverlet, and smoothed the sheet over it.

“Good-morning, dear. I hope you have slept well. Aunt Ann would insist upon coming up here to get breakfast, so Mr. Kirke is going down now to eat it.”

It was the first thing that occurred to her to say ; but Evelyn revolved it in her mind, after they were alone together, in a bewildered way. This was not a dream. She was quite sure Theodate could not caress her cheek with that palpable touch in a dream. No ; nor would her hand tremble so, and feel so cold.

“Aunt Ann — breakfast — I don't understand.”

"I believe Rosa did not sleep quite well : you know Rosa is a queer child."

Evelyn was looking her friend full in the face now, and there was the clear light of reason in her resplendent eyes.

"O Theodate, I have been ill !"

"We thought so at one time, Evelyn. Yes, you did seem ill. I fancy you had bad dreams. But you are better now ; and, if you want to please me, you'll go to sleep. Won't you try, dear?"

"I think I can never sleep again," replied Evelyn, looking restlessly about the room.

Where was the glass of water that had tantalized her so?

"Oh, thank you, Theodate, thank you !" said she, feeling like the baked earth in a drought, but little better for the rain.

And then her troubled eyes rested longingly upon her favorite picture, which hung on the wall at the foot of the bed ; a deep leafy forest, with harts slaking their thirst at a brook among the cool shadows. Would that she, too, could flee away and drink forever at that running stream !

"An empress, too," she murmured ; "unhappy creature, — drinking, drinking, drinking."

"Evelyn, those are deer. Look, and try to remember."

The pathetic tone aroused her.

"Oh, yes ! You painted that from a copy of the picture in the chapel tomb of Galla Placidia. Still, she was an empress," said Evelyn, rationally enough.

But next moment she was talking with strong ex-

citement and wild gestures about the silver-mounted horses, and the chariots full of people, that passed in review before her eyes.

"Why do they come and come? Look at me, Theodate. Don't you see I am not delirious?"

"Oh, any thing but that!" said Theodate re-assuringly.

"But what does it mean? I was never like this before, — to see visions coming like panoramas. But I am not cheated by them. I can read between the lines. Do you know," looking around fearfully, "it does seem as if something has happened to me since — since — What made you go away in the rain, Theodate?"

"What, indeed? How it did pour last night, Evelyn!"

"Was it *last* night? And you say I was not ill? I believe you, of course. How could I doubt *you*, Theodate, of all the world?"

XV.

*"A murd'rous guilt shows not itself more soon
Than love that would seem hid."*

SHAKESPEARE.

ON the second day Evelyn was calmer. She felt quite well, she said, though evidently depressed, and was able to go down-stairs and sit in the easy-chair by the parlor window. Theodate had hardly left her side since Monday morning, and looked strangely wan and worn, as if years had passed over her instead of hours.

"It refreshes me to get into our little world again, where every thing goes on in the old way," said Evelyn with a sigh of content. "It hasn't seemed natural, Theodate, your sitting up-stairs without your work, and waiting upon me so, when I'm quite well, — all but this odd feeling," she added.

She looked disturbed whenever she alluded to the "odd feeling."

"Oh, why can't I tell her the truth, when I know it would be the safer and wiser way?" thought Theodate. "It is part of my punishment that I must obey the orders of a doctor who does not know how to deal with the minds of his patients any more than their bodies. But here he comes now: I will not see him."

He dropped in by chance, so he said; but as the

same chance had occurred twice yesterday, and he was not in general a social man, Evelyn looked thoughtful.

"Oh, yes, doctor, I am well, strangely well! But something," here she lowered her voice tragically, "something has happened to me. Let me ask you about it before Theodate comes back."

"Tut, tut! Don't be nervous, my child."

"But, doctor, when I woke yesterday morning, I found Theodate and Mr. Kirke both watching over me, and looking, — oh, I cannot tell you how they looked! — but as if they were rejoicing, as if — O doctor, there were certainly tears in their eyes! Tell me, what had happened?"

"Happened? Nothing that I have heard of," replied the old Jesuit, with a conscience void of offence. "If you had been sick, they would naturally have sent for me, wouldn't they?"

"It was not that, doctor; Theodate assures me it was not that."

She hesitated, and averted her eyes. How could she ask him if he had ever heard of a case of insanity in any branch of her family? It was too horrible. But something must have happened to her during that blank in her life last Sunday evening after she went up-stairs, — something which nobody was willing to speak of. Was it mere unconsciousness? She had never been known to faint. Was it delirium? or, oh, was it possibly madness? The doctor might clear up this difficulty, if she could but ask the simple, dreadful question. She looked out of the window, as if appealing to the strength of the hills, and saw some one

turning in at the path. It was Mr. Kirke. She could not have spoken another word now; indeed, she was trembling so much that the pink fan in her hand shook visibly. But the doctor—good, undiscerning soul—saw nothing of her agitation, congratulated her on looking so well, and told Mr. Kirke, as he met him on the piazza in going out,—

“Our patient is all right, — head clear, nerves sound as a nut.”

Mr. Kirke chose to judge for himself; and he certainly did not agree with the doctor, when he entered the parlor, and “our patient” rose to greet him, with a strikingly pale face, and something of the troubled splendor of yesterday in her eyes.

But as she offered him her hand with a cordial, “I am very glad to see you, Mr. Kirke,” and he retained it a little longer than usual, finding it hard to let it go, her pallor gave place to a warm flush of crimson; and she went on with painful agitation, —

“And will you pardon me if I talk to you rather unconventionally? I must speak to some one; and Theodate only laughs, and the doctor calls me nervous. But you will listen, — I know you will, — and answer me, Mr. Kirke?”

“With all my heart,” the young man replied earnestly, drawing his chair near hers; but it is not to be denied that he felt a slight chill of disappointment. He had been greatly elated by her unusual and unreserved pleasure in meeting him; and now it turned out that any other person would have been equally welcome, any one who would listen to her and not laugh.

But how beautiful she was, sitting so near him, with

the tender glow of the evening sky illumining her face, — that face on which the shadow of the long night had so lately almost fallen ! If he had been a Romanist, he could easily have knelt before her, as before a saint called back from the gate of heaven. He understood now this invocation of the saints ; it should be henceforth a part of his religion.

“ I feel so uncertain of myself,” said Miss Searle, clasping and unclasping her hands ; “ perhaps this matter on which I am going to speak is rather too personal, — you are only a recent friend, Mr. Kirke ; but you have been so good to us, that I hardly ever think of you in that light. I forget that you have come into our life so lately : it seems as if you had always been here, as if we had always known you.”

“ Thank you for that, Miss Searle, for I know I originated in Narransauc ; my first incarnation was here.”

She laughed, and ventured to look at him. “ At any rate, you are my friend and Theodate’s.”

“ Yes, you may believe that. And isn’t that the right sort of friendship, into which one can carry one’s whole nature without any reserves ? If you hesitate to confide in me, I shall think you count me less than a friend.”

“ Oh, no, Mr. Kirke ! It is only because I fear you may not understand.”

“ Try me and see.”

“ Well, then, for the past few days,” — her voice faltered, but she forced herself to go on, — “ for the past few days I have been in the most singular frame of mind, Mr. Kirke.”

A smile flickered about his mouth. He thought he

could suspect, now, the mighty secret she was trying to reveal.

"It has seemed to me, sometimes, that I was losing my—I will not say my reason, for that has been as clear as ever—but the control of my reason. I am haunted by visions of ineffable beauty; they actually possess me,—perhaps I should say *obsess* me,—and I can no more dispel them, than I can 'shoot the moon with a silver arrow.' "

"No?" sympathetically.

"Think of my will so powerless, like a ship sailing wild!"

"Did you never feel in this way before?"

"Never." She paused, waiting for her voice to grow steadier. It was delicate in Mr. Kirke not to look at her, she thought. "I bore it tolerably yesterday, for I often fell asleep; but to-day it is—oh, so wearisome!"

"Are the visions still beautiful?"

"Not always."

"Grotesque, perhaps?"

"Yes, grotesque. But don't speak in that tone, Mr. Kirke, as if we were discussing a mere question in metaphysics. Can't you understand that this is life or death to me?"

"My dear Miss Searle!"

"Oh, you do not mean to be light! I know you pity me; but, consider, what does it signify whether I see angels or demons, when both are signs of a disordered brain, when I am just as powerless over one as the other?"

He would have interrupted her, but she went on with the eloquence of despair.

"Think what it would be to you, Mr. Kirke, to lose the empire of your mind, *yourself* dethroned, and hordes of shadows, mere chaotic shadows, rushing in wildly to take control."

"But, my dear girl!"

"You, a rational being, at the mercy of an army of —ghosts!"

"Miss Searle, may I talk to you, and try to relieve your mind? I do not like to see you tremble so," said he, taking her hand quietly in his own.

She seemed scarcely aware of the movement, and suffered it to lie there; while she regarded him with anguish in her face, and yet a dawning hope.

"Oh, *did* you ever know a sane person afflicted so before?"

"Certainly; these are opium fancies, my friend."

"Now you are trifling with me, Mr. Kirke, for I never took a particle of opium in my life."

"Begging your pardon, Miss Searle, morphine was given you last Sunday night."

She gazed at him with a look of puzzled terror. There it was again, that mysterious blank in her life.

"Oh, I must know about that! Tell me what happened Sunday night."

"I will," he replied fearlessly, determined to brave Dr. Stone's disapproval, and give her a hint of the truth: any thing must be better than this groundless agony. "There was a mistake made in your medicine, Miss Searle; you took belladonna, and to counteract it morphine was required. So do not be anxious another moment. Can't you see for yourself, that, with

both those drugs playing upon your brain, you would naturally be subject to hallucinations?"

"O Mr. Kirke, is that all, is that positively all?" she cried, so immensely relieved to find her reason safe, that she had no room for any other thought. "And I shall soon be myself again?"

Mr. Kirke felt a profound satisfaction in watching the happy play of her features, and seeing the frozen terror melt into joy; though at the same moment he lost his hold upon the little hand, which she hastily withdrew from his clasp, in some confusion.

"O Mr. Kirke, if you had not told me, I don't know what would have become of me; it was very kind of you to tell me. But Theodate" —

"You must not blame her," he broke in, wishing to end this colloquy as soon as possible.

"Oh, I do not blame her! It was kind in her to try to shield the doctor. It *was* rather strange the doctor should have made that mistake; don't you think so? Belladonna, did you say, Mr. Kirke? Not belladonna! Why, it might have killed me!"

She uttered the words without emotion, entirely unconscious that she was speaking the literal truth; but as he looked into her dear, living face, and contrasted it with the same face he had seen on that fearful night, as senseless as the pillow it pressed, the soul gone out of it, God only knowing whether it would ever return, the image and the recollections that arose with it were more than he could bear. He drew a deep, shuddering breath, exclaiming involuntarily, "Merciful heavens! I knew then how I loved you."

If the marble Clytie on the corner bracket had broken

into speech, it would hardly have startled Miss Scarle more than these words from Mr. Kirke, who, to say the truth, was quite appalled himself. Of the making of love, like the making of books, there is no end,—nor any end of methods and devices: but surely this could not be called love-making; this outbreak of feeling,—without purpose or design,—this merely instinctive cry of the soul. If any one had warned the young man, five minutes ago, that he was in danger of such an involuntary disclosure, he would not have believed it.

He was the last person to do an impulsive thing; he was slow, cold, deliberate, not like that fire-breathing Joe Fiske, thank Heaven. He could be depended upon to weigh a sentiment in the balance of judgment; and, if he should ever play the part of a lover, it would be that of a philosophical lover, well-bred, sedate, clear-headed; choosing the proper time and season, and by no means making the fatal mistake of speaking too soon. This point had been settled long ago. He was a person who shrank from the faintest semblance of repulse; he must be sure beyond the security of other men, before he would bend his proud neck to the yoke.

And now, what had he done? Why, it was only yesterday that his own feelings had been revealed to him; and he knew no more about Evelyn's than about the politics of the people in Sirius; yet here, in a brief moment of madness, he had staked all at one throw of the die!

If Evelyn had looked at him, which of course she did not, she would have seen him blushing like a girl, and dropping his head in his hands.

She could not have spoken ; nor was there any thing to be said, so far as occurred to her. He had asked no question, urged no claim, made no plea ; he had simply soliloquized into the air.

One does not know what to say to a soliloquy, or how to answer a question that has not been asked ; and Mr. Kirke ought to have understood her silence, would have understood it if he had been the philosopher he claimed to be. It was downright imbecility to fancy she could be offended with him for making a bare statement of facts, that called for no reply.

Where was his courage, that he did not go on after this bold beginning, and draw her to the confessional, and so make an end of it, like a sensible man ? He was not especially noted for humility ; what was there in Evelyn Searle to unnerve him like one " chased by the sound of a shaken leaf " ?

There may be some excuse for him in view of the stress of feeling he had lately undergone ; and perhaps, too, she seemed to him more like an angel brought back from the portals of heaven, than like a mortal woman to be wooed and won. But true it is that there he sat, speechless and shame-faced ; and there sat Evelyn, regarding the moon, quite oblivious of her late escape from death, which indeed she had not comprehended yet ; and there they might both have remained to this day, if Theodate had not come in and broken the spell.

At sight of her, Evelyn sprang up in relief, exclaiming, as if she had been thinking of it all the while, though in truth it had quite gone out of her mind till that moment, —

"O Theodate, Mr. Kirke has told me the whole story, about the belladonna and all; and you didn't mean I should know."

She spoke lightly, in her ignorance, and was not prepared to see Theodate grow so serious; nor could she in the least understand what the girl meant by clasping her arms around her neck, with the tragic cry, —

"Say this minute you forgive me, dear."

Did she refer to the unaccountable lies she had been telling? Lies are always atrocious, the whitest of them; but it was hardly in good taste to make a scene before Mr. Kirke.

"Why, Theodate, don't," she implored with her lovely, comforting smile. "I own I did feel a little annoyed once or twice; but knowing your motives — There, there, pray don't — for a mere trifle like that!"

"Do you call murder a trifle?" laughed Theodate tearfully.

Mr. Kirke interposed: "You perceive, Miss Wilder, I omitted some of the particulars."

"Oh, of course! Why didn't I think? I am so obtuse."

"What particulars, Theodate?"

"There, I shall have to tell her now. O Evelyn, you'll try not to be excited, since it's all so happily over? It was I who made the mistake with the medicine."

"You?"

"Yes,—I, Theodate Wilder; not the doctor. Dense as he is, he could hardly have blundered like that."

"Oh, well, never mind!" replied Evelyn with another smile, bent upon solacing Theodate, who seemed unduly sensitive over a small affair. "The doctor gave me the antidote, and that made it all right."

"What, that man? Never! Not he!" exclaimed Miss Wilder vehemently; "it was Mr. Kirke who saved your life."

"Oh, was it like that?" murmured Evelyn, a shiver thrilling through her whole frame.

She looked with dilating eyes at Mr. Kirke. She was intensely, thoroughly alive now, grasping the truth at last. And what soul would not be filled with awe on finding it had drawn so near the borders of the unseen world without a moment's warning or a conscious thought?

"O Father, what is death? We sport at eve;
A playmate's lips grow pale, the game stands still,—
He goes away in silence."

For a little while no one ventured a word. Mr. Kirke withdrew somewhat into the shade, where he could watch Evelyn without being seen, and felt inwardly vexed with Miss Wilder for her ill-timed confession. On general principles he had little patience with people who speak unadvisedly!

"And I did not know it," Evelyn was saying to herself. "I should never have known it till I woke on the other side."

The lace curtains stirred in a light breeze; something in the aimless motion fixed her gaze. She remembered how those same curtains had stirred while her mother lay dying.

"I watched them then; they rose and fell like her breath. She went away in silence, my blessed mother; and in silence I was going, too. How strange! Yet it is the way we all must go some day. Was she hovering over me? Should I have seen her if I had waked — outside?"

"I knew then how I loved you." Hush, those were not her mother's words! And Evelyn tried to think how sometimes during the past year she had almost longed to wake "outside" in light and freedom, — where she should see that angel face she had "loved long since and lost awhile."

And now that she had been so near the joy, was she sorry to have missed it?

No, oh, no! She was too young for that; life was too sweet.

"I knew then how I loved you."

Why would those words insist upon returning, like a *ritournelle*? They were absurdly out of place just now, amid her solemn, unspoken thoughts of the unknown.

Still, was love ever out of place? How could it be? What has one to look to, here or beyond, but love human or divine? And behold a devotion all new to her, a sympathy she never dreamed of, had gone side by side with her down to the chill ford; ay, and had called her back as her feet were entering the dark waters.

"It was Mr. Kirke who saved your life."

Wonderful! How should she speak her gratitude? But still greater was the wonder of his love. She could not choose but dwell upon it; though she had

no thought as yet of what it might involve to her or him, or the faintest sense of any personal responsibility in the matter.

"Evelyn," besought Theodate, "are you never going to speak again? After all the trouble you have given us, you bad little woman, and all the fright, you might at least say something, I should think."

This serio-comic speech aroused Evelyn from her reverie.

"O Theodate!" bending with pity and contrition over her friend, who sat on an ottoman at her feet; "O Theodate, how you have suffered! I am glad for your sake that I lived."

Theodate answered in jest, sternly resolved not to be tragic; and Evelyn recovered herself, and tried to look as if poisoning were a common experience: yet for all that it was a most affecting scene, and Mr. Kirke felt that he had no right there at such a moment. He rose slowly from his chair, in doubt how to make his exit, when Miss Searle extended her hand to him, —

"Don't go, Mr. Kirke. You wouldn't go till I have thanked you?"

Her voice was indescribably sweet; and her eyes blazed out radiant with a light that fairly dazzled him, and seemed to fill the very room with ecstasy. Was it all gratitude? She must remember the bold confession he had just made: had it offended her, if she could look at him like this?

He held her hand in a lingering clasp, but for a moment dared not trust his voice to speak. He must tear himself away; to stay longer now was hardly the way to justify her good opinion.

“ Good-night, Miss Searle. Good-night, Miss Wilder. May I call again to-morrow? ”

And only waiting for another enigmatical look from Evelyn, he was gone.

But what right have any of us to reckon upon to-morrow?

XVI.

"The Destinies ride their horses by night."

KORAN.

"LET'S see. Your name is Kirke, Benjamin Kirke? Yes, I thought so. Kind of lucky you happened over here in the nick of time so," said the telegraph-operator, looking up from his table, and speaking briskly through the open door. He knew Mr. Kirke perfectly well, having received several telegrams before to his address; but this was an important one, and he was glad to deliver it immediately. Moreover, it was not of a pleasant nature; and, being a kind-hearted man, he liked to temporize a little in such cases. It was not at all surprising that Mr. Kirke should be at the station at that particular moment; for he often strolled in on his way to the doctor's office, after an early dinner, finding a languid interest in watching the coming in and going out of the trains, which was the nearest approach to excitement of any thing the little town afforded.

The telegraph-operator put his pen into a tiny hole in the inkstand, partly rose from his chair, with one hand pressed upon the table, and seemed to expect Mr. Kirke to come forward and receive the despatch; which he did most promptly. The ink was hardly dry

upon it, and it had not been placed in an envelope or even folded.

CHICAGO, Sept. 5.

Father very ill. Come at once.

GERTRUDE KIRKE.

News like this is always a shock, come when it may ; always, for the moment, incredible. Yet in some cases we are able to say, upon reflection, " Why should it have surprised us so much, after all? There were reasons why it was to be anticipated." But no one could say this in regard to such news from Judge Kirke. No one expected any thing of him, but health and strength and length of days. He had never been known to swerve a hair's-breadth from the most monotonous well-being, to indulge in the slightest vagary of the nerves, even to the extent of a mild headache. Ben would as soon have felt anxious about the Egyptian obelisk as about his adamantine parent.

He read the despatch three times before he actually had faith in it. If it had only been his feeble mother ! But unless the wires had gone mad, it certainly was not his mother ; and it must be admitted that this, even in his real distress, was a distinct relief. He knew his mother's life hung by a thread, but the snapping of that thread would have unmanned him.

He respected his father, and had a certain latent affection for him, which now asserted itself with entirely new force ; yet if the worst should come, — he was very sure it would not, yet if it should, — and his father were not to recover, he could not look upon it as his own so much as his mother's grief. He did not think of himself so much as of her.

Holding that message in his hand, and still poring over it, a vivid impression came to him, such as he had never had before, of the closeness and tenderness of the marriage tie, of his mother's clinging trust in her husband, her absolute dependence upon him; and the thought of her possible widowhood was a cruel stab.

"She will turn to me; I will be her support," thought he, longing to take the gentle being into his strong arms that moment, and shield her against the very fear of ill.

He looked at the clock on the wall. It was usually wrong. He took out his watch, which was always right. He had not wasted a whole minute over the despatch, yet there were not six minutes to spare before train-time. How was he to get to the Druid, collect his effects, and prepare for a journey? It was not to be done. But here, as it chanced, were the landlord and Tom close at hand.

Nothing could exceed Mr. Simpson's devotion to Tom, whom he jolted about the village in all weathers, under the impression that fresh air was a panacea for broken limbs.

Mr. Kirke went out to them, wallet in hand, and made known the emergency. "You would not have thought I had run away, Mr. Simpson, if you had not seen me again?"

"You? You? Reckon I know when a man's to be trusted," said Mr. Simpson, pocketing the offered bank-notes with the air of disdaining this substantial appeal to his good opinion. "I'm sorry enough for your bad news, though; and my wife, I know she'll cry her eyes out to lose you. But you'll be coming back right away, I hope?"

"If I can," said Mr. Kirke sincerely, and turned white to the lips. He had a reason for wishing to come back, a strong reason; and it pressed upon him with prodigious force. But here he was, involved in an inevitable network of fate, and could see at a glance that the meshes were not going to yield to his will. They would soon dissolve of their own accord; they would not hold him long, at the longest, so he hoped. Yet when was he to see Evelyn again? When could he learn from her own lips how she had borne his stupid confession of last night? And what would she think of his flight?

Wait, he would send her the telegram, and let her see for herself what had called him away. Hastily enclosing it in an envelope, with a pencilled word of good-by, he intrusted it to Mr. Simpson's care.

"Keep up your courage, Tom. I'll see you again in a few days," said he, stroking the poor fellow's shoulder, as Tom looked up at him beseechingly.

Wasn't there something he could do for Mr. Kirke, some little thing? He'd got so kind of used to him, and knew where his things were, and all.

"Yes, I'll tell you, Tom, what you can do. You know there's an old wreath in my room, on the wall, and I happen to have a fancy for it. Just box it up carefully, will you?"

"And send it after you, sir?"

"Oh, no; merely to save it from Nancy's broom! I expect to be back before long. And the machine, Tom, that's yours for kindling-wood; or, stay, you can sell it to that tinman, Andrew; I find he's simpleton enough to want it."

"What, not leaving us, Mr. Kirke?" said one and another of the men about the station, with an appearance of regret. The Latium driver left his horses, to advance and shake hands, and hoped they should see him back again soon. It was evident that they had all come to look upon Mr. Kirke as a resident.

The whistle sounded. "Good-by, Tom. Good-by, Mr. Simpson. My regards to your good wife."

"Well, well, but she'll cry her eyes out," repeated the old gentleman benevolently, with a parting wave of his bandanna, feeling that he had paid the young man the highest of compliments, and hoping it would cheer him on his way.

And so Benjamin Kirke was turning his back upon Narransauc in this abrupt fashion; and hours might pass before the people at Violet Hill would hear of it.

The last face he saw at the station was that of Jimmy Skillings, who wistfully threw a bunch of pansies into the window. In response to the gift, Mr. Kirke cast a silver dollar toward the donor, pretty sure he would pick it up wherever it might chance to fall. He felt a certain attraction toward the little ragamuffin, as Miss Searle's *protégé*; and besides, if the pansies came from her garden, as he had good reason to suppose, they were low at any price.

"He is the roughest little gamin living; but Evelyn seems to doat on him, as she does on 'all things, both great and small, which suffer life,'" said he, placing the pansies reverently in the buttonhole of his coat, and looking back at the village whose outlines were slightly blurred in a September haze. Was it becoming a little nebulous already, this strangely quiet, dull village,

whose inhabitants seemed to live the dreamy life of memory? As the train passed a bend in the river, a bird sailing overhead cast upon the smooth water so clear an image of itself, that he queried for a moment whether there were two birds or only one.

And next moment the river was gone, the pictured houses were swept out of sight, and they were coming in view of the mountains and Violet Hill. Whose figure was that far away, by the sunny front-door? It was clad in white, and must be Evelyn's; and she was certainly watching the winding train. With a joyful impulse, he took off his hat to her from the car-window. She did not know it, but they were looking toward each other; and there was something in that, even though the glances of both were lost in space, like the smiles which angels lavish, perhaps, on blind, unrecognized mortals.

After this he sank back in his seat, and realized that the summer was over. He remembered that he had heard the crickets last night "singing spin, spin, under the leaves, and by the well." It was the fifth of September, and he had spent a long season at Narransauc, and this was the end of it. He did not care to look at the mountains, though they were to be had for the asking: he was in no mood for mountains this afternoon. They recalled to him what might be termed the Jehovah side of the Almighty, and suggested the inexorableness of law; and he shrank from the thought of law, now he was about to meet the workings of it face to face in a battle for life or death.

He could not forget the errand which was calling

him home ; but he tried his best to be an optimist, drowning his fears as well as he could, by saying over and over that his father was strong, and had perhaps thrown off the ailment, whatever it might be, by this time, and was calling Gertrude to account for wiring Ben home so tragically for naught. Above all, he would not think of the slight altercations he had sometimes had with his father. Possibly he had been in the wrong now and then, and there was a doubt whether he had been always duly respectful. These things do not look quite the same in the clear, unsparing light of an awakened conscience, and he really dared not review them to-day.

As for dropping law for medicine, he was sure he was right there, and whatever came should never regret it. He saw now that he had meant all his life to do this thing ; and his coming to Narransauc had only aroused the dormant purpose, and hastened a step that was inevitable. But he would not say any thing about this to his father while he was ill ; perhaps it was as well not to mention it, at present, even to his mother.

But there was one thing he should say to his mother, and he found great solace in thinking of it : he should talk to her of Miss Searle. He knew how interested she would be, and how pleased, like any girl, to hear him say that Evelyn reminded him of herself, and that it was this resemblance which had attracted him at the first.

“ I do not know how I shall describe her, except to say she has sunshine in her hair and in her heart, and a rare, fine face, — ‘ a face to lose one’s life for ; ay, and more, to live for.’ No rhapsodies, — I despise

them. I will be careful not to betray my real feelings to mother; I'll wait for that till I've been back to Narransauc and learned my fate."

He looked at the moment as if he had small fear of his fate. At this distance from Evelyn, and no longer oppressed by dumb diffidence, he carried a bold heart. He reviewed her words and looks, and thought she had given various slight, intangible signs which were very hopeful. And the more he dwelt upon them, the more hopeful they grew. True, he had no right to aspire to such a peerless woman; nor would he presume to do it if she knew her own worth, which providentially she did not. The most remarkable thing about her was her humility, and this emboldened him. Then, too, she was so charitable, kindly overlooking everybody's shortcomings, even Joe Fiske's; and, if she was so gracious to poor Joe, what might she not be to a person of really sound mind; a young man, for example, who had tastes in harmony with her own, and was really capable of appreciating her,—in fact, did appreciate her to the very depths of his soul,—and had ventured to say so, but who had at the same time the delicacy to refrain from pressing his suit till she gave some response?

When Mr. Kirke's hopes had soared so high as this, it was time for them to sink a little, as they did when he called to mind sundry pin-thrusts Miss Wilder had given him concerning idleness. Did Miss Scarle disapprove of him, too, in her gentle, pitying way? He threw up the window with a sudden feeling of oppression. He *had* been a graceless idler; he admitted it. But a new purpose was stirring within him; he was

trying to reform, and she had seen that he was trying. She might not consider him in every way admirable; yet was that the point, after all? Had he not read somewhere, that "love does not ask for perfections, it asks for its own"? If that is so, and he felt that it must be so, the question was simply, Did they belong to each other? And here his heart went up again at a bound; for what lover ever doubts his own intuitions in this regard? Yes, they surely belonged to each other; and, though she might not know it yet, the knowledge would not fail to come.

It is noticeable in these ruminations, which lasted through the whole journey, that he did not dwell upon the fact of having saved her life. The scenes of that terrible night were ever before him, but he never magnified the part he had played; and, as for presuming upon it as a passport to her favor, the idea was unimaginable. Some young men might have reflected that a young lady is naturally grateful for being rescued from the grave, and that gratitude may lead to a warmer sentiment; but this would not have occurred to Ben Kirke, or, if it had, he would have scorned himself for it. He was not shrewd or calculating or mercenary; he could not traffic in a sentiment. Besides, what did he want of a sentiment that could be bargained for? Away with a love that was not spontaneous.

He thought of Kate Stanley, and smiled to remember that the time had been, and that only two months ago, when he considered these things only matters of opinion and circumstance, when he challenged himself because he could not be duly impressed by the suitable young lady whom the family had ordained for him.

Well, he knew better now. But Kate was a pretty girl, a very pretty girl; and, if he should meet her to-morrow at his own house, he should not be annoyed as heretofore, by her too evident admiration for — Lucy.

But now, after two nights spent on the train, here he was almost at the station. They could not have looked for him quite so soon, or they would have sent the carriage. He entered a hack, and carefully avoided thinking of his father. He assured himself that he should probably be in Chicago only a few days, — that is, if all went well at home, — only a few days just now; and then he would return to Narransauc for an interview with Evelyn before beginning in earnest his future studies, either in New York or Philadelphia. He would go to Maine next week, — yes, surely by the last of the week.

He kept declaring this to his throbbing heart with more and more emphasis the nearer he approached his home. But what an endless distance it seemed from the station! He could not say he did not dread alighting from the coach. Ah, there was Caligula dancing down the path to meet him!

Good heavens! what did he see fluttering at the front door? Not crape?

“O Benjamin, my son, my son!” said the pale little mother, sinking into his arms as he entered the hall. “Before the despatch reached you, it was too late.”

XVII.

*"So Heaven but thy cup fill,
Be empty mine unto eternity."*

R. W. GILDER.

"THIS is one of the lost days," said Evelyn to herself. "It looks back at me, and says reproachfully, 'Why did you let me go?'" She was in the garden, watching a gorgeous crimson and gold butterfly, as it stooped to embrace a blossom of red clover, hovered lovingly over it, and then ficklely flew away. The tender green ferns planted near the old willow were neglected; so was the waving grass with its delicate, feathery top. No, back comes the butterfly to kiss the grass; it is the sweet clover-tops that are neglected now, and the moon-faced daisies. One can never predict of these airy, coquetting butterflies where they will finally alight.

"I believe there is a faint shining at the tips of the grass, — the autumn-shine which usually comes toward the last of September. I have hardly thought before that the summer is really going; it has been such a short summer, so brilliant too; and there has been so much in it to divert one's thoughts. — O Theodate!" said she aloud, as her friend approached and playfully threw a light shawl over her shoulders, "it is not late enough in the season for shawls, I hope;

or am I growing old, do you think, with a latent tendency to rheumatism?"

Theodate, who had not outgrown the gratitude and joy of Evelyn's recovery, bent impulsively and kissed her. Why would not the dear girl submit to being cared for, when it was her own supreme joy to find little ways of serving her?

"You look pale to-night, Evelyn. I am sure these callers have been very wearing; but the whole town is so glad I did not succeed in destroying you, that they *will* come, and keep coming; I don't see how we are to help it."

"Oh, how should I feel if they didn't want to come? What would life be to me if nobody cared whether I lived or died?" said Evelyn with feeling. "Only, I must say, I haven't accomplished much for a whole week. One can't, you know, with so many people coming and going. Four quarters do not make a whole hour, Theodate, to a writer. The pieces can't be joined together, you know."

"Very true; they fray shockingly at the edges. But, Evelyn, you are not well yet. Why will you persist in writing now? Why not wait till cooler weather, and take these beautiful days for rest?"

"Perhaps I might as well," was the plaintive response. "I own I was discouraged when the mail came last night, and"—

"We ought to have had more letters; there were some strange omissions," said Theodate, thinking to help Evelyn over a hard place; for she wished, without doubt, to speak of Mr. Kirke, and found it difficult.

But Evelyn had no intention of alluding to that

vagrant young man. She "steered her course, the woman's diagonal," quite away from Mr. Kirke. "The truth is, Theodate, — I know you will be sorry, and I hardly like to tell you, — but one of my stories came back last night."

"Oh, that was too bad! Which one?"

"'The Christmas Rose,' that cost me so much labor, and seemed to both of us one of my best. It came back without a word, except that dreadful death-warrant of a printed circular."

"The story was too good for them, my dear."

"But they sent one back in April."

"Well, I suppose they had editorial toothache, then, or neuralgia from the spring winds. Try a more discerning editor next time," said Theodate stoutly.

She often despaired of her own pictures, but her faith in Evelyn's stories was sublime.

"You dear little bird of paradise! I never saw you so low before over a rejected manuscript."

The bowed head was raised now, and Evelyn retorted with some spirit, "But you feel it, Theodate, when your pictures are criticised; you feel it deeply."

"Yes; for I'm the great-granddaughter of Lucifer, fearfully proud and ambitious. — And fortunately perhaps," added Theodate to herself with compressed lips; "for what would be left to me, a lone woman, in case Evelyn should go out of my life? What, indeed, but my absorbing interest in art?" Then, turning to Evelyn, "You were with Mrs. Simpson a long while this afternoon. What did she say of Mr. Kirke?"

"Oh, it was just as we heard at first. He was summoned home very suddenly."

"Still, Evelyn, it is strange he should not have sent us some word."

"Rather. But his father may be very low; and in that case he has had no time, even if he has thought of us at all."

And then she deftly changed the subject to some defaulted bonds, which she had scarcely thought of in a month. Theodate's face was sure to take on a look of helpless dismay at the least financial allusion; and Evelyn liked to call up that look sometimes, when Theodate had worsted her in an argument, or when, as now, she tried too curiously to read her thoughts. It was the only cruelty in which Evelyn ever indulged towards this superior young woman.

"Defaulted? Yes; you said *equipment* bonds. Let me see, that means—oh, yes, your uncle spoke of 'watered stock,' and a—a—per cent! Don't laugh, and don't explain. Please don't explain; you know it makes me feel that 'I wish I was a washwoman.'"

This was the favorite plaint of their neighbor Mrs. Skillings; and it happened somewhat curiously that at this very moment she was making it to her son Jimmy, having fallen into her usual slough of despond over mending with a strip of calico his otherwise unavailable jacket. "Oh, hum! I wish I was a washwoman! Why, what's this, you good-for-nothing boy? Who's this letter to, and how came it a-mellowin' in your pocket?"

Jimmy clutched at it with surprise, and even a glimmer of remorse, unwilling to confess that it was for Miss Searle, and had been intrusted to his heedless hands by Mr. Simpson. But his mother could read

writing, being of a literary turn ; far too literary indeed for a woman with aspirations toward the laundry, as two or three yellow-covered pamphlets on the floor bore witness.

" 'Twas wrote in pencil, and is 'most rubbed out ; but that letter is for Evelyn Searle, the best friend you've got, and how you came by it is more'n I know."

" Mr. Simpson give it to me at the deep-o t'other day," spoke up Jimmy, frightened into the truth, or rather the truth frightened out of him, by the pelting of his mother's thimble on the organ of conscientiousness.

" Don't see what he was a-writin' to her for," said Mrs. Skillings, turning the dingy, battered letter over and over in her hands, in search of a weak place where she could peep in without breaking the seal.

" Mr. Simpson didn't write it," pursued truthful Jimmy ; " 'twas that tall man that goes to see her so much, — the one that give me the dollar," he had nearly added ; but this was a secret shared only with his alternate friend and foe, Bob Short, and by no means intended for his mother's ears.

" That tall man? What! you don't mean that pretty Mr. Kirke? Well, I never! And she haint seen it yet, and don't know he wrote it. Why, you miser'ble, wicked boy," with another application of the thimble, and still another, appalled by the thought, " Maybe he's broke up a match ;" for, though " disespoused " herself by the desertion of the recreant Mr. Skillings, she still held romantic views of marriage ; and her gratitude toward Evelyn took the form of a

desire to help on a possible love-affair, that would "read off like a story in a book." "Do you wash your face this minute, James Skillings," — a ceremony rarely observed on week-days; — "and put on Bub's jacket and his straw hat; and do you march up that hill as quick as you can fly, and tell her you lost the letter in a mud-puddle, and I found it for you. Now, mind."

And having done her very best to repair the mistake, which might have ended in Evelyn's "mishiating away" to a love-lorn skeleton, and dying at last in single misery, the good woman dropped a few indiscriminate boxes on the ears of her children, and stood with hands on her hips to watch the reluctant Jimmy out of sight.

"I dunno but I'd ought ter gone myself. What if he should go and hide the letter, and then have the brass to lie to me about it?"

But, to do Jimmy justice, such an alternative did not occur to him. He made excellent speed, only pausing once to throw stones at a cat, thus showing himself the superior animal, — the cat being unable to retaliate, — and was at Violet Hill in one-third the time his corpulent mother would have required for the journey.

"Look here," said he, presenting the letter to Evelyn with a look of injured innocence, "I should have give it to you at the time of it, only Bob Short's dawg — I never see such a dawg, always getting things and rolling round with 'em in the dirt. I tell ye it's awful about that dawg."

They were all in the garden, and the sun was setting.

Evelyn held out her hand for the soiled missive, wondering who could have sent it; while Theodate prepared to administer a rebuke to Jimmy for making a scapegoat of the "dawg." By that time the letter had been opened.

"Nothing but the despatch which Mr. Kirke received last Wednesday," said Evelyn, passing it over to Theodate. The words, "I leave immediately, will write you soon. Good-by," were hastily scrawled on the margin.

Verily this is a relative world, in which all things take their meaning from the mind of the beholder. This piece of yellow paper, which had struck a chill to Ben Kirke's heart, awoke a glow in the heart of Evelyn Searle. Strange that bad news, and a few words written in the flush of distress, should become a message of healing. Evelyn did not acknowledge to herself that she cared for Mr. Kirke, but she wished at least to respect him; and his sudden, silent departure had seemed very much against him.

"Well, I am glad to do him tardy justice," said Theodate, giving back the note to Evelyn.

But her voice broke off sharp and cold. The yellow paper was no message of healing to her, but the sign and seal of something sorely to be dreaded, — something she had fondly hoped might never occur. She had begun to think Mr. Kirke had no serious interest in Evelyn; and if the dear girl should chafe a little now under his unkind neglect, and suffer a few twinges more or less of wounded pique, it would be a blessed mission for Theodate to heal the trivial wounds.

But if he really cared, if he should persist, what then?

"This despatch sounds very alarming," said Evelyn with a misty brightness in her eyes.

"Yes, very," echoed Theodate. And then the sudden sensation came over her that one has in taking ether, like going giddily down a precipice; and she leaned against the oak-tree for support. She had been very languid since the late tragedy; for, brave as she was in spirit, she could ill bear any strong emotion. There was a physical cause for this, or Theodate would have despised herself. Her doctors assured her her mind was not weak, but she suffered from a weak action of the heart; and this restored her self-respect.

Jimmy, after waiting a reasonable time for his usual carrier's fee of a penny, grew discouraged and walked away with speechless indignation, making all the noise he could through a hollow pumpkin-vine. And presently, as twilight was falling, the young ladies walked into the house together, but not arm in arm. It seemed to Theodate that that vague something, so greatly to be dreaded, had almost taken tangible shape, and stepped bodily between them, and would keep its place between them forevermore. Well, she could bear it, and she would bear it, only give her time; she must have time.

"I believe there is a September chill in the air," said Evelyn; merely, it would seem, to break the silence; and Theodate replied, "Yes, I feel a chill."

Rosa was coming now with the mail. She had another letter from Peter, — which she held smilingly between her teeth, and would read aloud in the kitchen presently, — two letters for Miss Date, and one for Miss Evelyn. How could it have concerned Theodate, that one letter to Evelyn, when she had her own to open

and read? Why need she have taken note of the dashing superscription, in the moment it flashed before her eyes? And how could she recognize it as Mr. Kirke's, when she did not know his hand? Was it a thing to wonder at, that he should have written to Evelyn and not to herself? Alas and alas! Must she still contend with that wild illusion? There had been no idea more central to her mind for weeks than this of Mr. Kirke's preference for Evelyn. She had forced herself to dwell upon it, had tried to familiarize herself with it, setting aside all unworthy thought of self. In her secret heart she had fancied — but that now seemed very long ago — that she understood him better than Evelyn did; and that he was dimly conscious of it, and instinctively turned to her rather than to Evelyn for sympathy and counsel.

“Yes, for sympathy and counsel. It was only a mistake of mine,” thought Theodate, crushing her unopened letters in her hand. “We must have illusions of some sort to keep us alive, and that was one of my illusions. Yet was it a very strange one, after all? If I had had Evelyn's face and figure, her charm of manner,” looking at her from under her eyelashes, “would it then have been strange? Would anybody have blamed me then for the thought? No. Theodate Wilder in a finer garment of flesh would have been love-worthy. Theodate Wilder as she now is, plain, brusque, angular, is unwinsome to the last degree.

“This is a point I never understood,” she thought sorrowfully, “why one's dearest happiness should turn upon a minor point like beauty. It seems unjust. And it is not only one's dearest happiness that turns

upon it, it is one's destination for life, — yes, one's destination for life."

Evelyn read her letter in her chamber, and the two friends did not meet again till she came down-stairs to say good-night, with a new look — was it joy, or only perplexity? — upon her face.

"There is something I would like to say to you," said she hesitatingly; "something that will surprise you, I know."

"Is Judge Kirke worse?"

"He is not living."

"I am sorry to hear it. Is that what you wanted to tell me?"

"No."

"So I thought. But wait till to-morrow, dear. I would rather not hear it to-night." This with a warm kiss upon the hesitating, trembling lips. And then, as they parted at the door of Evelyn's chamber, Theodate added, "I wish you to understand, little one, that I am not near-sighted in my affections, any more than you are. I know you would be glad if some beautiful thing were to happen to me: so why shouldn't I rejoice if a beautiful thing were to happen to you?"

"Oh, but, dear" —

"Only wait till to-morrow, and you may tell me all. I will listen then with my whole heart."

Truly Theodate was brave, after all, and her pressed grapes yielded red wine.

XVIII.

"It is easier to be altogether silent than not to speak a word too much."

THOMAS A KEMPIS.

A MAN having drawn a pail of water from a well, by means of a long pole, now sits on the well-curb lost in thought; while the water in the pail may be supposed to behold with surprise the blue sky it has never seen before, gradually losing all its zest and sparkle, however, as the surprise dies away to tame familiarity; a reflective tub, also looking upward at the sky; two well-loaded apple-trees with gnarled branches, presenting the appearance of playing calisthenics; glimpses of damp white clothes drying in zigzag lines, — all these objects in the background: in the foreground, a luxurious patch of clover, and a beautiful white and bronze-red calf disporting gayly therein. This is the picture which Theodate has outlined upon her canvas with much spirit, and which she is finishing now rather slowly and laboriously. She is in the attic with her easel, sitting under the skylight, where she likes to sit when the weather is not too warm.

The sun is flooding her blue-black hair with a white light; she wears her usual "business apron" of black cambric, fantastically besprinkled with every shade of color.

Evelyn comes in with the preface of a little knock, but hardly waits for an answer. She is lovely even in that plain print wrapper. What a soft, fair, infantile complexion! Theodate turns her head with a smile of welcome, but does not miss the stroke she is giving the nose of her calf. Ah, that stroke tells! Now the pretty creature seems to sniff the clover in those happy nostrils. How thoroughly alive he is! Perhaps, though, there is not enough of the "morning dazzle" in those young, mellow eyes.

"Well, Evelyn?"

"Yes, Theodate." There is a lingering sweetness in Evelyn's tones, which savors of reluctance.

"Take this chair by me."

Evelyn first removes several color-tubes, a palette-knife, and other artist properties, and seats herself slowly. The chair is a confessional, Theodate is the priest. Theodate is not regarding her, — her eyes are on the calf; but she listens well while she works, and Evelyn considers it an advantage to be able to talk without her friend's eyes upon her. On second thought she rises, places the chair at the right of Theodate, and farther back. This gives her a better view of the picture.

"Have you found a name for it yet?"

"Yes, — 'Living in Clover.'"

"Excellent."

"Well, go on. I am listening."

It was nothing extraordinary that Evelyn had to say: just the old story of a man who lays his heart at a woman's feet, uncertain of her royal favor; and it was given hesitatingly, as one translates a poem from a

foreign tongue. A trite tale, and poorly told; but Theodate listened reverently, as if it were a new thing fresh out of heaven. She waited for some hint of Evelyn's own feelings, but none was given; the girl kept strictly to the point.

"I thought you ought to know this, Theodate."

Theodate thanked her; and then she set a star in the calf's forehead, bent her head backwards, half closed her eyes, and scanned him with the rapt, admiring gaze of the working artist.

"You will not answer in haste, Evelyn? When is he coming back?"

"Not very soon, there is a great deal there demanding his attention. I'm sure he would not have written just yet if it had not been for something he said to me the night before he went away," — a pause, — "something which would naturally lead me to expect him to say more," she added, blushing daintily behind Theodate's back.

But Theodate was left to imagine what he had said. For that matter, she had been left to imagine most of his letter. Evelyn had really told her very little; and perhaps, when carefully condensed, there was not very much to tell. His father's death had been a grievous blow; and his mother was utterly crushed, requiring his whole attention, and scarcely allowing him out of her sight.

"I am glad for her," said Theodate, "that she has such a son. I remember his calm strength, how good it was to lean on last week, when my heart was failing me for fear. Oh, won't you come here, little one, and give me a kiss? There is no paint on my

cheek; and it is so refreshing to feel that you are alive."

Evelyn stole softly to her friend's side, put both arms round her neck, kissing her again and again with unusual fervor. Theodate set down her palette and her brush, and laid her hand silently on the golden head that was level with her own.

"Shall I not call on Heaven to bless her. my one ewe lamb?" said she to herself, "my one ewe lamb that has been spared me in mercy? And shall I harbor any regret at giving her away to a dearer, stronger friend, who has saved her life? God forbid! — And now tell me, Evelyn," she asked, "what does your heart say?"

Evelyn moved away, half frightened, though she affected a gay tone.

"It says three words, Theodate." Their glances met then, and the solemn eyes of Theodate held something in their depths that Evelyn could not see.

"I suppose I know them, dear. The three words are, '*I love him.*'"

"No, oh, no!" vehemently. "They are, '*I do not know.*'"

"That makes four words, Evelyn. Have you forgotten how to count?" laughed Theodate with a sudden feeling of relief. Then added jocosely, "But love knows no arithmetic, they say."

"Theodate, you speak as if I had a right to a — a — sentiment. What do you mean? There are things to be thought of — other things; first of all, that compact you and I made when we began to live together."

"Not first of all, Evelyn. You would *not* consider that first of all?"

"Why should I not, Theodate? Do you call that promise mere child's play? For my part, I meant it in good faith, and I gave my hand upon it to keep it while I lived."

"But I absolved you from your promise, Evelyn, a week ago last Sunday night. Don't you remember it? I granted you absolution before your—death," said Theodate; and a great shudder ran over her. How could she have uttered that last word? She often shocked herself by the levity with which she treated serious subjects. But, in truth, it was her sole defence against the intolerable weakness of tears.

Evelyn did not reply at once. She was thinking of that dread scene which would never seem quite real to her, and of Mr. Kirke's part in it; and it moved her deeply. Yes, waver as she might, one thing at least was secure, — her gratitude to him for having saved her life.

"Theodate!" She looked flushed and uncertain.

"Well?" returned her friend, with shining eyes and rather overdrawn composure.

"Theodate, you need not have been in such haste to absolve me. You might have waited at least till you were asked."

Theodate smiled and nodded.

"It was my far-seeing heart, dear."

"I don't know what you saw or could have fancied," went on Evelyn hurriedly, her color deepening; "but your speaking in that way hurt me a little at the time, — as if you thought I were longing to break away from you, — as if" —

"You shall have no restrictions, Evelyn."

"But I want them, I cry out for them. Stand by me, Theodate."

"Verily, I will, — while you need me."

"O my better self, I shall always need you!" exclaimed Evelyn with a fervor which almost shook her friend's calmness. "Have we not been sufficient to each other heretofore? Have you ever tired of our compact, Theodate?"

"Never, ma'am! 'An' I had but one penny in the world, thou should have it to buy gingerbread,'" quoted Theodate quickly.

"And if this — no, not this, but something like it — were to come to you, would you set me one side, Theodate, and settle the question without a thought of me?"

There was a scarcely perceptible pause before the answer came, —

"I hope I should behave like a sensible being, Evelyn Searle. But how can I tell without the trial? And I shall always be mercifully spared the trial." She laughed lightly. "You know as well as I do, Evelyn, that friendship yields the right of way to love."

"You talk without any reason, Theodate. A friendship like ours, that has been tried and proved, — would you compare it for a moment with the — the other sentiment, so very precarious and foolish, that turns the heads of young girls? Only think how suddenly it springs up, how swiftly it may go."

"I will not listen to that, child.

'Ye do him wrong, ye do him wrong:
Love will stay for a whole life long.'

"Yes, the real, the heaven-born will stay, no doubt; but how is one to recognize him?" asked Evelyn, raising her perplexed eyes to the rafters, along which an enterprising spider was weaving a festoon.

"I admit he may come in disguise," said Theodate archly.

"Yes, or he may be a counterfeit; there's the danger: so one's only safety is in keeping him away altogether."

"Oh, you lovely, pusillanimous creature!" mused Theodate, watching the play of Evelyn's mobile face. "I'm in full sympathy with Ben Kirke, and in his place I know I should have loved you to distraction. But what my chances would have been, Heaven only knows.—Evelyn Searle," waving her brush toward her, "if I should cut into you anywhere, I believe there wouldn't a drop of blood flow! What are you made of, — lilies and roses; or swan's down and snow?"

Evelyn laughed.

"I am a stranger to myself, Theodate. All I know for a certainty is, that I'm idling away the morning, and that it will never do. Good-by;" and she rose, and went away without so much as a glance at the calf, who had been growing apace on his luscious diet of clover.

"Well, I didn't show the white feather, did I?" thought Theodate, and dropped her brush with a heavy sigh. "It's always one thing for me, never any other. It's renunciation from the cradle to the grave." She looked white and worn. Her persistent work during the warm weather was telling upon her, but she would not admit it. Like M. Michel, when she was ill, she "turned her face to the wall."

"Perhaps I take this too seriously. She does not care for him yet, and why should I forbode?" She did not resume the brush, but leaned back wearily in her chair, with her left hand pressed against her side. "I told her yesterday I was ambitious, and I hope I am. We free women are so very free," resting her "homeless eyes" on her canvas. "We need to be tied to something, like this little calf, which I have half a mind to tether to a crow-bar. Yes, we all need some sort of tethering, or we may rush away in a wild scamper. That is what I dread for myself by and by, — the wide stretch of freedom, the embarrassment of space. I need a crow-bar with a chain, or I need a fence. In other words, I must be persuaded definitely of what I ought to do, and then be compelled to do it. Welcome, art! Courage, my soul! It was not for you that the world was made. It was not for you that the sweetest friend on earth was born."

After this there was scarcely any conversation between the two friends regarding Mr. Kirke. Theodate only knew that Evelyn was still a "stranger to herself," and that he intended to see her again face to face before she gave her answer.

Early in December they sent Rosa home to her mother, and they both went to Boston for the winter. In a few days Mr. Kirke came there on a flying visit.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Freeman, their old landlady, sagely; and "Ah?" said the old boarders curiously. And then somebody ventured to wonder what had become of Mr. Fiske. Theodate held her peace, being prudently blind and deaf.

Mr. Kirke came and went daily ; and his frank, respectful face, which had attracted Theodate from the first, was illumined now by a hope, if not a joy, which made it dangerously pleasing to look upon,—or it might have been dangerous once. But, fortunately, no one knew this but Theodate herself. No one would imagine how near she had come only last summer to falling into the “bottomless pit of nonsense.” Well, she had been rescued from that most effectually, and they were certainly the very best of comrades and friends.

As for Evelyn, she no longer said to Theodate, “I don’t know.” On the contrary, she simply said nothing. When Theodate remarked that he was improving, she asked demurely, “In what respect?”

“Why, he has a settled aim in life now. It was all he ever needed; for you know he always thought rightly, and felt delicately. It was his only fault that he was too much of a dreamer.”

“Perhaps so. He seemed to be talking to you with great animation to-day,” said Evelyn, in an inquiring tone.

Theodate broke forth into the gayest laughter. “Do you know, he was explaining his business affairs.”

Evelyn joined in the laugh. “How much of it did you understand?”

“Now and then a word. But I looked wondrous wise. Pray tell me, Evelyn, is he reduced to poverty?”

“Not quite that; but, to the great surprise of the family, they find the judge had met with heavy losses, and not much is left but the small property that was

made over to his wife. So far as Ben is concerned, I am glad of it; for it is the greatest blessing that could have happened to him," said Evelyn with a quaint, unworldly air. "At the best, his father's estate could not have been settled under a year; but, instead of being at the best, it is at the very worst, fearfully involved; and this is largely due to bondsmen's debts. You know what bondsmen's debts are, Theodate?"

"Oh, dear no!"

"Never mind. I ought not to have expected it of you," returned Evelyn indulgently. "But they are very trying debts to bear with, and to have to pay; and they practically ruined Judge Kirke."

"What a pity!" said Theodate; but the undercurrent of her thoughts ran joyfully. "Then there can be no marriage at present, no marriage at least for a year."

Would there be one at all? Who could say?

Evelyn came up-stairs that evening remarkably late from church, and confessed, with a comically demure air of penitence, that she had allowed Mr. Kirke to talk a great deal.

"About his business affairs, I suppose?"

"Now, Theodate," said Evelyn deprecatingly; and then they both laughed.

"I did not mean to be inquisitive, child, and I don't like to make suggestions. Still I own I should be better pleased if you knew when your hands and feet were warm, and if you had the prudence not to stand in the hall door in a draught."

Evelyn took not the slightest notice of this remark. "My dear, my dear," said she, dropping her head

between her hands, "he is going in the morning, and I am sending him away without an answer."

"Evelyn!"

"Theodate, you have been trying all along to drive me to the wall. You have no pity on my vacillation."

"Who would?"

"Ah, if it could be always as it was last summer, when we were all friends together, and there was no question to decide!"

"Let me hear no more of such idiocy," said Theodate severely. "You have no right to play with him in this way. Haven't you any pity for a man who has been 'smiled upon by misfortune'? Do you know, child, you are downright cruel?"

Evelyn swayed a little, as if she had received a physical blow, but kept her face in her hands.

"And do you know, furthermore, that some men would set you down as a mercenary woman, for hesitating now, just now after these reverses?"

"What can you mean, Theodate, and why should I care what 'some men' would think? *He* knows better than that," cried Evelyn, raising her flushed face and speaking vehemently. "I am not afraid of *his* misapprehending me,—a noble, high-minded man like Mr. Kirke."

"So you do appreciate him? I rejoice in your consistency."

"Indeed I appreciate him; but he is not as old and tried a friend as you, Theodate. I knew you first. You and I are one, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Theodate, much moved, pressed the bright head

against her shoulder caressingly. "If I did not feel, dear, that you might some time be sorry for this, I would respond with all my heart, Amen! But I declare to you, Evelyn Searle, if you let me stand in your way in this thing, I will never forgive you as long as I live."

"You don't quite understand," whispered Evelyn, nestling still closer, and veiling her face in Theodate's falling hair. "It is not you who stand in the way: it is myself, my slow, cautious nature. I suppose I am naturally what would be called a cold woman; am I not, Theodate?"

"You are not impulsive, certainly."

"Some women's hearts are like the Lia Fail I have somewhere read about, that always vibrated when the true king stood on it to be crowned," said Evelyn, in a wistful tone. "It must be a blessing to be like that, to 'know past all doubting, truly.' But Mr. Kirke says he is willing to wait. He is not like you: he does not blame me, Theodate."

A jealous pang seized Miss Wilder, of a different nature from any she had yet experienced.

"Is it possible," she thought, "that he understands her better after all than I, who have known her so much longer? Has love a truer insight than friendship? Who knows but it is so, and his patience may win her in the end?"

"And what then? Hush! Who am I, that I should grudge him his reward?"

When she spoke again, it was almost meekly.

"How long will he wait for your answer?"

"A year, Theodate. Remember, last June I had

never even heard his name. He will wait a year, and I have told him he may write ; and I hope, by that time, we shall have revealed ourselves to each other. At any rate, I can act no differently in a matter so serious as this, affecting his whole future life and mine."

Evelyn stood erect now, and calm and self-assured.

"And when I give him my answer, Theodate, it will be once for all."

Theodate looked at her humbly and admiringly, and wondered why Heaven had not made all women like her, so cool and consistent, and so sweetly reasonable.

"You are right, Evelyn. You are right now and always."

XIX.

*"I would it were not as I think.
I would I thought it were not."*

SIR THOMAS WYATT.

IN February Mr. Kirke set off with his invalid mother for Drogheda, in Southern California, to pursue his medical studies there with the eminent Dr. Palmer, formerly of Chicago. The next September, at the expiration of a year's mourning for their father, both the sisters married, and each of them claimed the widowed mother. But she expressed the wish, very gratifying to Ben, to "be with my son," wherever he might choose to go. It looked now as if he would choose to remain in California. The year was passing, and October had come.

The "young ladies" and Rosa were no longer "three lone women:" for Rosa had taken to herself for life Peter, the enemy of rabbits, and brought him home to Violet Hill; and there the four lived on together "in laughing comfort."

The permission which Evelyn had given Mr. Kirke to write was freely interpreted to mean a frequent and voluminous correspondence. His letters showed him very enthusiastic over his studies. He was thankful, he said, to have escaped the "wasting confusion" of trying to adapt himself to the law, a profession he

had always disliked, and in which he never should have succeeded.

"Ah, well," laughed Theodate, "it will not be his fault, Evelyn, if you two do not become thoroughly acquainted!"

But, in spite of herself, the days when letters came from Drogheda were sad days for Theodate. Was she sinking to the second place in her friend's affection? If she had needed stern lessons in humility and self-effacement, she was receiving them now.

"Self-effacement!" The word came to her so forcibly one day, as she sat in the attic painting a landscape, that she swept her brush over the foreground and blotted it out; feeling that she must illustrate the idea in some way, to see what it stood for. A neutral tint? Very well; she could accept that instead of rose-color. She could stand one side, and be content with borrowed happiness, satisfied to subserve in all patience and good cheer the destiny she could not change. All she asked was to have a reasonably clear forecast of that destiny; and she thought it was high time to have it.

But Evelyn remained quietly reserved and inscrutable. Uncertainties were grievous to Theodate; they tried her nerves, and wore upon her health.

"If only this had been settled when Mr. Kirke was in Boston last winter," she said to herself, little dreaming that the time was soon to come when even she would rejoice that it had not been settled, when she would agree with Evelyn that it is well for a woman to move slowly in an affair that involves her life's happiness.

Thus far Mr. Kirke seemed to be fulfilling every expectation of his friends; and Mr. Searle was fond of repeating what the Danforths of Boston had said of him last spring; how promptly and manfully he had risen to the occasion when his father died, and he was left administrator of a badly involved estate. He might find legal affairs irksome; but he certainly understood them well enough for all practical purposes, and was still engaged, in the intervals of his studies, in looking over accounts; would come to Chicago in November for a final adjustment; and in December — Evelyn assured Theodate it would not be a day sooner — he was to visit Narransauc, and receive the fateful answer from her lips.

“Six weeks longer! But, if he can wait, surely I can wait,” thought Theodate.

There had been no especial changes in the village for the past year, except that a few of the residents had dropped quietly away, — among the number good, unamiable aunt Ann Searle, — and the others were all growing older. Ozro was in college. He had passed through the hazings, active and passive, broken a finger or two at base-ball, and was gradually developing some humility, and respect for those inferior people, his elders.

And now we come to a sudden break in the quiet tenor of our story. It was a mild day in October, when the silver poplars on the bank were half turned to gold, and the bright maple-leaves were dropping in the sun like gold-dust. Evelyn, in the arm-chair by the south window, looked up from the book she was reading, “*The Life of Mme. de Staël*,” saying to Theodate, “I dare not read another word, for fear of

committing a murder in my heart. I am fairly trembling with rage against Napoleon Bonaparte."

She remembered this speech afterward, in the long days when she was no longer able to forget herself in a book.

As she looked up, her eyes rested on the bass-wood tree near the window. Two birds were clinging to a nearly leafless bough, and the wind rocked them; but there was no motion otherwise, except the quiet twinkling of their small eyes. Then Theodate began to talk of the photograph of Mr. Kirke's mother, which he had sent, and laughed a little at the young man's harmless delusion in thinking it resembled Evelyn, the two faces being unlike in every particular; and Evelyn laughed, too, with careless mirth.

"And now how shall I frame this for the parlor?" went on Theodate, holding up a water-color picture of violets. "Would you approve of an oak frame, with a coat of gilding, and around the violets a deep mat, postal-card color?"

Evelyn meekly assented, with restful confidence in Theodate's judgment; though the confidence would have been the same under any combination of colors.

Then Mr. Searle came in, his face lighting up as Evelyn rose to greet him. Had she been to tea, and would she like to walk out with him and see the sunset from the "crest"? Oh, yes, she had had her tea, and would like the walk; for "sunsets are joys that never grow old"!

This reminds Theodate to look at Mr. Searle, and observe regretfully that his hair and beard are fast whitening with the "snow that never melts."

He has mourned for his wife more than might have been anticipated, considering the wreck she made of his life. But he thinks of her now as the ideal love of his youth; and is he wrong? There was something at the very root of her being that was revealed to him as to no other; and his heart responded to it, and knew it was not deceived. She had her uncomfortable faults; but more and more he forgives the weakness of the flesh, and more and more he remembers that "spirit is always lovely."

Evelyn was in a happy mood this evening, as she put on her hat and walked up the well-worn hill path with her uncle. He depended more than ever upon her society of late; and she often fancied, that, when he seemed unusually depressed, her own spirits rose inversely.

As they passed the back-door, she "smiled one of those smiles" on Rosa and Peter, who stood watching a squirrel on the lightning-rod, making a dainty meal of pig-weed seed. In her sweet benevolence she was glad that the little red squirrel should enjoy Violet Hill, as well as the phebes and sparrows, and Peter and Rosa. A lean and hungry cat issued from the stable, and crept abjectly after her. The poor thing had "adopted her," Evelyn said; and though she assured him he was "not welcome," and admonished him as sternly as she could to go away, he construed her gentle tones into an invitation, and only drew still nearer his "adopted" friend, rubbing his cheek against her dress, till Rosa came, laughing, and took him away.

Mr. Searle looked on amused; and then the thought

arose in his mind, was this lovely woman destined to spend her whole life in this simple way, blessing and sweetening the atmosphere of home, but never extending her influence beyond the narrow round of Violet Hill and the neighboring village? He had had ambitious hopes for her, and not long ago had been well pleased to watch what he considered a growing attachment between herself and Ben Kirke. But this had come to nothing so far as he knew, and perhaps after all it was quite as well. He did not hold the stereotyped notion that marriage is the only good for woman, and that without it her life is perforce a dismal failure. He was an enlightened person, who could appreciate high character in a young lady, and still say to himself inquiringly, —

“Would she have walked more nobly, think,
With a man beside her to point the way, —
Hand joining hand in the marriage link?
Possibly yes; it is likelier nay.

And dreads she never the coming years?
Gossip, what are the years to her?
All winds are fair, and the harbor nears,
And every breeze a delight will stir.

She reads the Hereafter by the Here,
A beautiful Now and a better To Be.
In life is all sweetness, in death no fear:
Ye waste your pity on such as she.”

Still, he would not have quoted these lines as applying to his niece, he could not have told you why; he would have thought them more appropriate to Theodore, for whom he had always felt the highest admiration, amounting almost to reverence.

"Evelyn," said he, after the sun had finally disappeared from view, with its lingering pageant of glory, and they were descending the hill toward the village, "Evelyn, I saw Mr. Danforth the other day, in Boston, and he spoke of our old friend Mr. Kirke."

"Ah!" said Evelyn with a pretty, rising color. Her uncle seldom alluded to the young man, and might or might not be aware of her correspondence with him. But, at any rate, he was too formal and too well-bred to condescend to rally her on the subject.

"Yes; and they say Ben is getting a good deal of what you may call surreptitious practice already among Dr. Palmer's old patients; for the doctor is failing in health, and Ben has gained their confidence by some pretty good work he has done there. Let's see, what's the name of the place? Drogheda? Well, Mr. Danforth says he has performed some rather remarkable surgical operations out there. He gave me the particulars, which wouldn't interest you, of course; but I assure you, Evelyn, I was astonished, — yes, fairly astonished."

"I am very glad," said Evelyn with a shy smile of pleasure. "You remember we thought he did wonderfully when Mr. Simpson's Tom met with that accident, and we said then he was meant for a doctor."

"Certainly we did; and we said it again with still more conviction afterward, when you — at the time he saved your life, my dear," said Mr. Searle, his voice low with emotion. "I admit I did not like his throwing up law: it struck me as disrespectful to the profession; but he was right, as it has proved, perfectly right. He talked with me about it at the time, and

seemed to look at the thing in all its bearings ; and I respected him for his courage. He had started wrong, he said, and the only thing he could do was to begin anew and start right. But he did not realize then how hard it was going to be for him financially," continued Mr. Searle, who seemed to have the conversation mostly to himself. "You see he had a very advantageous position with Mr. Randall, one of the best technical lawyers anywhere, and they could easily have led the profession in Chicago, if he had not made this change of base before he knew how things were going to turn with his father."

"I wonder," said Evelyn reflectively, "if he had not made the change before his father's death, would he have made it at all?"

"I have thought of that myself," returned Mr. Searle. "It takes courage, at any time, to leave a certainty for an uncertainty ; and when he had that worn-eaten estate on his hands" — He shook his head slowly, by way of finishing the sentence.

Evelyn looked thoughtful. Perhaps she had never comprehended fully Ben Kirke's difficult position and the struggle he was making. She had been very glad that he held to his resolution, and she had told him so ; but it had probably cost him more than she knew ; and she meant to say in her next letter that he rose higher in her esteem when she thought how much he had sacrificed for conscience' sake.

"He has made no moan, so far as I know ; and I like that in him," pursued uncle Mellen. "He was born to a fortune, and that is a state of things neither you nor I can very well appreciate."

"No, we were not born to fortunes, uncle, — we Searles."

"And to lose it at a stroke was severe for Ben. Think of Ozro under the same circumstances."

"Oh, Ozro!" said Evelyn with a sort of mild contempt.

"Ozro would probably have done as well as the average young man," responded the proud parent quickly; "but he wouldn't have faced the situation without some grumbling, I assure you."

Evelyn quite agreed that he would not; and then she fell into a brown study over Ben's last letter. There had been an allusion in it, almost for the first time, to his narrow fortunes, and the tedious delays of study. Had he ever repented leaving Mr. Randall, and beginning the world anew at the very foot of the ladder? She had asked this question before; and now she pondered it again, walking on in silence till they were passing the Druid, when she paused and said, —

"Suppose we go in here a moment, uncle Mellen? I am under a solemn promise to Rosa to beg Mrs. Simpson's recipe for imperial cake."

So they went in. Mrs. Simpson was glad to see them, and asked them into the back parlor, where the old piano stood, that always so excited Evelyn's imagination. She liked to turn back the faded cloth cover and touch the sallow keys, calling forth the thin, regretful melody of other days; and Mrs. Simpson said it was "reviving to hear her: it brought up her girls, more particularly Betsey." "Would Evelyn take off her bonnet?"

"Oh, yes!" Mr. Simpson said. "Why not stay

awhile? Tom was in the office, and on duty; and they could have a social evening all by themselves."

And partly from good-nature, partly from the lack of any real excuse for going, they both lingered. Evelyn laid aside her hat, and fell into light discourse with Mrs. Simpson; while her uncle discussed graver matters with the host.

In the midst of some animated remarks from the old lady, concerning the imperial cake, Evelyn heard Mr. Simpson, who seemed abnormally wide-awake, say to Mr. Searle, —

"I got all kind of nerved up to-night by a paper that came to me from Californy. — Wife, where's that paper?"

In vain were conjugal glances of warning and entreaty, in vain the attempt to divert Mr. Simpson's attention to other matters: he still clamored for the "Californy paper." And Evelyn wondered a little at first, and presently a good deal, why Mrs. Simpson should be so slow and reluctant about producing it. She finally found it under the piano-cover, where Evelyn could not but think she had hurriedly placed it when they first came in, for the purpose of concealment.

"I never had any thing stir me up so," pursued Mr. Simpson, "not since that scrape of Martin Field's;" and his eyes fairly snapped with excitement as he opened the paper and ran up and down several columns with his finger. "Let's see, 'twas marked with red ink. Oh, I've got the wrong page! I always set by that fellow Kirke; as likely a fellow as ever breathed, I thought he was. There, I've found it: here it is."

"Not Ben Kirke of Chicago? What has he done?" exclaimed Mr. Searle.

Evelyn instinctively drew back into the shade. "Dear me. I was *afraid* there was something between 'em," thought Mrs. Simpson. "How pale she is, poor lamb! I hope she ain't going to faint."

The newspaper was the "Drogheda Pioneer," and it contained the following startling announcement:—

"A DARK TRANSACTION.

"A bold attempt to raise money by forgery has just been discovered. Mr. James Hall of Maysville, four miles from Drogheda, recently bought from B. I. Kirke of this city—Dr. Palmer's medical student—a promissory note for two thousand dollars, signed by John Harris and Peter Small of this city. When Mr. Hall presented the note at the Farmers' Bank, some doubts were expressed as to its genuineness; and Harris was telephoned, who came in, and, on being shown the note, at once pronounced it a forgery. Small afterwards denied his signature, also. Mr. Kirke has been hitherto much respected; but his guilt admits of no doubt, and he was immediately arrested, and remains now in close confinement."

XX.

*"I will rise,
God helping me, to higher life, and gain
Courage and strength to give thee in thy pain.
Fear not, dear love: thy trial hour shall be
The dearest bond between my heart and thee."*

"WHOSE saying was that, 'Every man has his price'?" asked Theodate of Mr. Searle, as they sat next evening by the open fire in the back parlor. Evelyn had sent her love to her uncle, and was sorry not to see him; but she had suffered all day from a headache, which did not "go down with the sun."

"Walpole, I think," replied Mr. Searle with a pained frown between the eyes. "A hard and bitter saying it is, too; I never indorsed it." They had been discussing Ben Kirke's alleged crime, which Miss Wilder vehemently declared "incredible," and which Mr. Searle admitted was "staggering."

"What a signal mercy that Evelyn was not interested in the fellow!" he thought, though this he did not say to Theodate.

"It is an acute disappointment to me that Judge Kirke's son should turn out a villain. I knew the judge well, and he was certainly the soul of honor."

"And I had faith in Ben, and would have gone to the stake on it," returned Miss Wilder, sitting very erect in her chair.

"Yes, to be sure. And it was only last week that

the Danforths were lauding him to the skies. Well, well, I hate to give up the boy," said Mr. Searle with an outward wave of both hands, as if regretfully flinging him away.

Theodate sighed, and gazed into the fire. A large, wicked-looking red brand, about to fall headlong upon the hearth, personated Mr. Kirke on the way to ruin.

"He promised well," said Mr. Searle, "but was not sound at the core. He could not stand the test of sudden poverty."

"Yet," contended Theodate, "I never saw any one who seemed to care less for money."

The lawyer smiled slowly and sagely. "When you knew him, he had not learned the value of money. He had all he cared for then, and much more than he needed. It was only after he went down in the world that he fell into temptation."

"Still, I can't understand it, Mr. Searle. To say nothing of his principles, he certainly has excellent sense; and that forgery was so sure to be found out. Why, how dared he?"

"It was foolish, but forgeries are usually foolish. I suppose he had no idea that the note would be presented at the bank in Drogheda."

"Do you know any one in that city, Mr. Searle?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"If there were only some person there you could write to. Isn't it barely possible this may be a mistake?" Theodate looked up wistfully. Only yesterday Mr. Kirke had been in a sort her natural enemy, the one being in the world she had cause to dread. To-day he was beneath contempt; but, strange to say,

she would have laid down her life to give him back the power to make her unhappy. The reason of this was not far to seek. She knew now, by Evelyn's silent anguish, that her heart had been given to the keeping of this villain.

"A mistake? I am afraid not," returned Mr. Searle with a decisive shake of the head. "A man isn't apt to be arrested for forgery by mistake. Ben is well known in Drogheda by this time, and his identity cannot be questioned. I am sorry to say there is a moral certainty of his guilt."

Mr. Searle was a lawyer of judgment and experience, not a person to leap to hasty conclusions; and Theodate sighed again, and looked into the fire.

But there was an element of strong persistency in her character; and, without saying more to Mr. Searle, she wrote that very night to the "Postmaster, Drogheda," asking the simple question, whether the item which she quoted from the "Drogheda Pioneer" was true or false. If false, how she should rejoice to say so to Evelyn, poor, pale child, who kept about her daily tasks with pathetic patience, and had but once mentioned the name of Ben Kirke, and that was when she told Theodate the shameful story.

Many days elapsed, and Theodate began to think the postmaster had not received her letter, or, if he had, did not mean to reply. But finally an answer came, extinguishing the last faint ray of hope. "The item quoted was true in every particular," he said. That was all, but it was more than enough. Theodate never told Evelyn that she had written.

Evelyn said one day, in a low voice, averting her

head, "I think it is time I should return Mr. Kirke's letters."

It was now November, a month before he was to have received his final answer.

"Yes," responded Theodate.

What an immense package the letters made, and now how worthless! Evelyn had not trusted herself to look them over, and wished to forget that they were going to a man who occupied a prisoner's cell.

Some time after this, Theodate saw her remail a fresh letter from Mr. Kirke, unopened, but nothing was said. It was not Evelyn's way to chatter upon a subject which lay so near her heart. She was learning now, when all was over, that Ben Kirke, with many minor faults, had been after all her ideal of a true and noble man, the man she could honor and — let us say it clearly — love.

She put away this ideal reverently, as one buries the dead; but the real Ben Kirke, the unprincipled being living in California and committing cold and shameless crimes, what had she ever known of *him*? He was a stranger. It had pleased him to masquerade at Narransauc; and he had masqueraded cleverly — she would give him credit for that. It was a cruel game, but common, she believed, with "men of the world." At least, this was what she had always heard; she knew very little herself of what the world really is. He had masqueraded, and completely deceived her and all the other simple people of the town. The worst anybody had ever said of him was that he was "a drone;" and she smiled to think how even that had vexed her, and how resolved she had been not to

care for him unless he should rouse himself and go to work.

As for his integrity, she had never even questioned it. That goes without the saying among decent people, she thought; forgetting, alas, that defaulting and forgery are the crimes of the educated, rather than the ignorant! And she had come so fearfully near accepting his light love! She was thankful now for the slow reserve and coolness of her nature, which had saved her from that utter wreck.

She felt no resentment toward him: he was more to be pitied than blamed; born probably with a total lack of moral sense, like Martin Field, that handsome, plausible young man who superintended the Sabbath school at Latium, and was arrested as he came out of prayer-meeting for a sly piece of swindling. She could not hate Mr. Kirke. Nothing he could ever do, or fail to do, would take from her the overpowering gratitude she felt to him for having saved her life. Life was dear, though it must be admitted it did not seem to her just now the priceless boon she had been wont to regard it. No, she could not hate the man who had saved her life. Besides, he loved her: she never doubted that; not very deeply or very worthily, merely in the 'careless, shallow fashion of men of his sort. But no woman ever quite scorns the man who loves her. What she had to do now was to put him out of her thoughts. She would not discuss him with any one, least of all with Theodate, whose eyes flashed dangerously at the chance mention of his name. Theodate was naturally hard upon sinners; and Ben Kirke was an unspeakable sinner, who had aspired — what

sacrilege!—to the hand of Evelyn Searle. His crime of forgery was black enough in any light, but tenfold blacker when you connected him in your mind with that spotless, radiant woman. Theodate could forgive royally an injury to herself, —that is, upon the offender's showing due repentance, — but an injury to Evelyn was another matter: she had no intention of even trying to forgive it.

Moreover, a certain feeling of self-blame intensified her bitterness. If she had not espoused the young man's cause so warmly, perhaps Evelyn would have forgotten him long ago, and so have escaped this fiery trial.

"Was I born to commit blunders?" thought poor Theodate.

Though Evelyn never alluded in the most distant manner to Mr. Kirke, her silence regarding him was eloquent, and appealed to Theodate's heart. In one thing, if in no other, the two friends were alike, — they were not given to idle complainings and weak tears.

Evelyn made a thousand excuses for her pre-occupation and sadness. Either the weather was oppressive, or her brain was tired, or her stories "would not write." And, try her best, Theodate found she had lost the power of re-assuring her. When she begged her not to fret over a rejected manuscript, for she "had noticed that articles which had met with reverses in their youth were apt to turn out brilliantly," Evelyn said "Indeed!" with quiet irony.

"Why, yes. Don't you remember your 'Christmas Rose'? The great American traveller, we called it; but, when it found a home at last, how much it was

admired and copied! Have faith in yourself, dear, — if you cannot in man," she added mentally. "Think of the praise you have received from the very highest sources."

Evelyn drew the fleecy shawl about her, — she wore that shawl now when the weather had the slightest chill, — and recalled the words she had lately read of Mme. de Stael: "Fame for woman is only a splendid mourning for happiness."

Not that Evelyn expected ever to know any thing of fame from her own experience. She could only imagine what it might be like by the frequent tokens of appreciation which came to her from admiring strangers, chiefly enthusiastic, fresh-hearted girls; and these tokens always pleased her. Still, she knew that the same thing, immeasurably increased and infinitely repeated, could never fill her life or satisfy her heart.

"What do I care for praise, Theodate? A mere breath that blows warm to-day and cool to-morrow."

The weary tone touched Theodate, who turned her head away, saying to herself in the words of stanch old Mother Bickerdyke: "Poor thing! But she has two friends, God Almighty and me." And when she spoke again it was to relate an absurd little story, which she told capitally; though Evelyn rather failed to see the point, and hoped Theodate was not falling into the anecdotal habit, which is so tedious when carried to excess.

For the first time in all their acquaintance, Evelyn was now and then a little irritable, suffering keenly afterward for any slight petulance toward Theodate, who for her part never heeded it in the least. She was absolutely "unwoundable," or so she would have

it appear. In her continual care for Evelyn, and her desire to drown for her the sorrow which they could not call by name, Theodate thought seriously of a trip to Europe. By strict economy it might be managed, she believed, and a year's stay abroad would work marvels for the child. As for herself, — if she had stopped to think of herself, — this would be her joy of joys. She could not remember the time when she had not had a more or less lively longing to cross the sea for study. But whenever she ventured in a tentative way to speak of Europe, Evelyn's response was always a shudder and a gentle shake of her head. "Oh, that dreadful ocean! You are not serious, Theodate?"

"Do you expect me always to be serious? Can't we have our little jests?" smiled Theodate, concealing her disappointment and crushing back her unruly wish, as if it had been a deadly sin. She might go abroad alone or with some one else; she had friends in Bangor who were making up a party. But she would not go and leave Evelyn. Evelyn needed her.

Theodate always knew infallibly what to do. She would stay where she was needed.

A year passed, — nearly two years. It was sometimes remarked that Evelyn was less lively than formerly, and that Theodate did not look well. Yet no one ever heard Miss Wilder complain; and if asked about her health, she seemed surprised.

"What did they mean? Oh, to be sure, she *was* ill a few days last week; but that did not signify! She had been subject to trifling attacks of the sort from a child."

She answered, "Oh, no!" to the query, "Did she

come of a consumptive family?" And this relieved the friendly anxiety of the neighbors, who held the theory that a New Englander with sound lungs is entitled to a long life, unless taken off by accident.

If she had once hinted that these "trifling attacks" concerned that vital organ the heart, Evelyn would have suffered great alarm; and what was the need of that, when, as Theodate trusted, God would spare her life for many years to come? "I will not be mourned and buried till I die," she thought; "and I shall die but once."

She was usually in fine spirits, the life of the house, Evelyn declared gratefully; but nobody suspected how restful she would have found it to lie down after her day's work sometimes, and only close her eyes, or at most open them to look at the stars, without the effort of speaking. But it was always in the evening that their little strolls were taken out of doors, with plenty of pleasant chat; or old friends dropped in, and Theodate would never leave the burden of their entertainment upon Evelyn. Evelyn admired and wondered at her vivacious friend, and leaned upon her unconsciously more and more.

"I'm getting on in years," said she playfully, as they sat one night at tea. "As we grow older, I think we recede within ourselves, like dim pictures. At least, it is so with me; but as for you, Theodate, you are perennial."

"If you are growing dim, my dear, you need to be retouched," said Theodate with a professional look; "retouched and freshened, say, by sea-air. Take my advice, and run away to the islands with your uncle."

"But it is you who are ill, Theodate. Will you go too?"

"I? Oh, not at present!" with calm decision.

A half smile crossed Evelyn's face.

"Now, Theodate, tell me truly, do you mind that foolish gossip about you and uncle Mellen?"

"Not one bit; do you? People ought to know I wouldn't marry Mr. Searle without his consent," replied Theodate with her wholesome, inspiriting laugh.

She had never stood much in awe of Mrs. Grundy; and if that amiable creature chose to chatter and surmise because Mr. Searle kept on calling at Violet Hill since his wife died just as he had called there before, why, then, so much the worse for Mrs. Grundy.

"No, Evelyn, it is these slow pictures. I cannot take them, and I will not leave them. Only think, how that miserable bit, 'Drones' Honey,' has clung to my hands."

"A painting with such a name is doomed from the beginning; throw it away," said Evelyn, with a sort of contemptuous pity for herself as she remembered the happy day when she and Mr. Kirke had discussed the meaning of those words, which now served Theodate as a text for one of her rustic sketches.

Poor, unprincipled Mr. Kirke! His whole life had been an irregular, idle quest for drones' honey, which had proved a bitter morsel to his tongue at last.

"Theodate, your industry is something appalling; and you are not well, though you will never let me say so," said Evelyn, looking anxiously across the table at her friend's face.

During the past year its dark pallor was more

noticeable than ever; and her ears, always very white, had now the translucence of thinnest porcelain.

"It is you, Theodate, who need the change, not I," removing the napkin from a glass of delicate orange jelly, and passing the glass to her friend with a winsome smile.

Theodate had been making a mere pretence of eating, but the jelly was an agreeable surprise.

"Thank you, dear, it is delicious. How can you always be thinking to do such pleasant little things? Last night it was broiled pigeon, and the day before it was lemon jelly with rose-flavored custard. It is beautiful of you, but rather absurd since I am so very well, you know."

"Yes, I know how well you are. I never saw any one so superlatively well in all my life. It is remarked upon throughout the village," said Evelyn dryly, but with such tender solicitude in her tones that Theodate could easily have dropped her head in her hands and wept from sheer love and gratitude. But that would never do, she told herself; she hoped she was not such a weak bit of flesh as that.

"Oh, fie! I am over-petted, that is all," said she presently, dipping her spoon into the jelly with great composure. "Beside, I intend to meet you at the islands by and by. I only want you to go first and pave the way."

"But why," asked Evelyn, chafing against this steady persistence, and all the more since she knew it was sure to win in the end. "Why should I go first? Why should I not wait till you are ready, may I ask?"

"Because, for one thing, you are better without me

for a little while," declared Theodate, in measured tones, but smiling cheerily.

"What can you mean, Theodate?"

"Only that we are too much shut in, dear, to ourselves, with very little from outside to divert us. We re-act upon each other, and reflect each other's moods; and though we are both remarkably brilliant and original," with a droll face, "our mental health requires that we should separate, now and then, for a season."

"Thank you," returned Evelyn, in a pretty, half-petulant way. "And it is I who must go?"

"It is you who write stories, little girl. Don't you always say you find an inspiration in new scenes and new people?"

Evelyn did not respond for a moment. She was thinking of a rock near Dillon's Island, dashed upon at high tide by the rising spray, and thinking what a good type it was of Theodate withstanding the feeble pleadings of Evelyn. An unselfish, grand, and every way estimable rock was Theodate; but the playful, futile waves might as well consider that it was low tide now, and subside with quiet grace.

"Very well, you have extinguished me this time, Miss Date; but I hope you will allow me to say you are not in the least capable of taking care of yourself, and my heart will ache for you all the while I am gone. You will order the kitchen fire out, and subsist upon crackers and milk, for aught I know," said Evelyn, in a quivering voice.

This was the last sally of the loving, ineffectual spray, as it sank to dead low tide. It was to be, and she accepted it. It was one of the things marked out

from the beginning, that she should go away from Violet Hill and leave Theodate, who was really ill and needed her care.

But how little do even the tenderest friends know of each other, after all! What would have been Evelyn's surprise on her first evening with her uncle at Dillon's Island, if she could have looked in at her own home and seen Theodate dispose herself upon the sofa, languidly fold her hands, and say pathetically, —

“Oh, it is sweet to be alone, and dare to feel tired!”

XXI.

"And then he will search Jerusalem with lamps, and the hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light, and the arguments of tongues shall be hushed."

THOMAS A KEMPIS.

"OYSTERS on the half-shell; bottle of lager," ejaculated Mr. Fiske to the colored waiter, before fairly seating himself at the little oval table. It was his favorite restaurant in the heart of New York city; and the servants had learned, by experience, that delays were dangerous when serving this brisk little patron, who ordered his dinners as breathlessly as a broker screams out the rise and fall of stocks on Wall Street.

Nimble young John shot across the hall like a ball from a gun; but before he could possibly return even empty-handed, the very unreasonable customer was seated on the edge of his chair, twirling his hat, and meditating a scathing rebuke for the delay.

"By all the powers!" he cried next moment, springing out of his chair and darting forward, as a tall, large gentleman walked leisurely down the hall. "Kirke, is that you?"

Dr. Kirke smiled in reply, and offered his hand. "Glad to meet you, Joe. I was going to look you up."

"Sit down here, old man, and let's have a chat. I've nothing under the sun to do for an hour. Why, where

did you drop from? How natural you look!" passing him the menu.

"I've been in Chicago a day or two, and came here on a little matter of business," replied Mr. Kirke, taking the vacant chair opposite his friend, and depositing his hat on the floor. "How fares it with you, Joe? I hope you are well;" for the young man was slighter than ever, if possible, and was developing a tendency to baldness, while a sharp groove had settled in his forehead between the eyes.

"Oh, I'm well!—So you're here at last, John?—Have some Baltimore oysters, Kirke? They roast them here to a turn."

Dr. Kirke gave his order to the boy, with a look which recognized him as a human being, and stirred his heart with gratitude. Whatever Ben Kirke might lack in sound principle, he had one claim to nobility: he was always a gentleman to his inferiors.

"Yes, I'm well," repeated Joe, as they pursued their little dialogue, undisturbed by the clatter around them.

"And doing well?"

"Fairly well. I have a chance to invest in lots of schemes on commission."

"Why, I thought you were an editor, Joe."

"So I am, and a little of every thing else. Fact is," with a burst of confidence, "I've made most of my money shaving notes." This with a covert glance at his companion out of the side of his eye.

There was no impropriety in the shaving of notes; but the time had been when Joe would hardly have confessed such a thing to Ben Kirke, whose supposed

ideals were rather too lofty for that sort of business. What a prig Ben used to be! But, like most prigs, he had shown his true colors at last; and one need not scruple now to talk with him openly about little matters of sharp practice. Joe had never pretended to be virtuous above his fellows; neither, on the other hand, had he ever committed a crime.

He had been studying Ben ever since he came in, and could not see but he was as easy and self-possessed as ever. What was he made of? Well, it might not have injured his prospects so much, after all, that trifling irregularity of forging a note. People in those new countries slide over such things pretty easily; they are willing to let you live down your sins and mistakes. Very kind of them, too. Joe would certainly have expected to see Ben present a somewhat abject appearance. He must be poor, and ought to look shabby: but here he was, as well clad as ever; and instead of stooping, as had been his habit, his shoulders were now well squared, increasing his apparent height, and he had the alert, earnest air of a man who has enlisted on the right side, has no past to be ashamed of, and sees a grand future before him.

"Can't understand it," commented Joe mentally, with decided disapproval.

"My mother? Oh, she died, poor thing, a year ago! I tell you, Ben, I felt that, though I never said much about it. One can't, you know. Yes, my sister is married and off my hands; married to Russell Barbour. You remember Russ?

"What, I married? No, sir. That's a luxury that can't be afforded, my boy," said Joe, dropping his

eyes. He was not the romantic youth of three years ago, and was wont to make merry over most of his juvenile absurdities. But perhaps the time would never come when he would cease to feel uncomfortable at the thought of his moon-struck behavior at Narransauc.

"And now, Kirke, let me ask *you* a few questions. Turn about is fair play. Married?"

"No."

"I rather wonder at that. Like me, you can't afford it, eh?"

There was no answer to this, and Joe proceeded: "Did you stick to medicine?"

"Yes," laconically.

"Well, I wasn't at all sure you would. Do you know, I considered you a mild kind of idiot for leaving Randall. Why, he's the leading lawyer in Chicago."

"So I hear."

"Well, are you doing much? Come, now, be as frank as I have been."

"Yes; I had the advantage of fledging under Dr. Palmer's wing, and was well started in practice before he died."

"I'll warrant it. You always were the luckiest dog," muttered Joe with a rising of the old envy. "And now you're carrying all before you?"

"As you say of yourself, I am doing fairly well," was the modest reply.

And Mr. Fiske, knowing Ben of old, needed no other assurance that he had had exceptional success. So the Drogheda people, bad luck to them! not only

tolerated swindlers, but received them into the bosom of their families on confidential terms. And here was he, Joe Fiske, a very white sinner by comparison, but how hard life had gone with him! Abominable, considering the pains he had taken never to lie or cheat without the law on his side.

"I've had some hard lines, though," continued Dr. Kirke, laying down his fork and preparing to be communicative, as he saw that Joe was not satisfied with his meagre disclosures. "I had a tough experience, the first year I was out there, with a sharper."

"Ah!"

"A fellow of precisely my size and figure happened along; and, when he saw me, he set to work to victimize me."

"How was that?"

"Why, he did me the honor of pretending to be Ben Kirke; that is, he posed in that way before a few people in the next town, who barely knew me by sight."

Joe had set down his glass, and was staring hard across the table at his friend, who went on, serenely unconscious.

"The miserable rascal drew up a note for two thousand dollars, running to me, and signed by two of the citizens of Drogheda. He copied their names from a couple of signs on the street, I believe. And then he took the note to Maysville, and sold it to an old farmer for part of a share in a gold-mine."

"That sounds rather thin," faltered Joe. "No farmer of common-sense would take a note in that way from a stranger."

"Oh, he thought he knew the man well enough!

He had seen me once or twice at the doctor's office, and the resemblance was really very striking."

"But did he give the deed without verifying?"

"To be sure. He was an honest, simple-minded old man, and I suppose it never occurred to him to doubt the identity. And he didn't present the note at the bank for some weeks, and by that time the scamp had absconded."

"Well?" Joe's voice was rather faint.

"Oh, I had a pretty hard time of it for a while, — a pretty hard time! I was kept under guard for some weeks, till the affair was cleared up satisfactorily. But, Joe, there was one good thing about it. It brought me hosts of friends. I never shall forget the people who rallied round me in my hour of need, — never, I assure you." There was moisture in Ben's eyes, but he dashed it away hurriedly. "Well, well, I don't know when I've thought of this before; but our talk had a tendency to make me reminiscent," said he, rolling up his napkin, and apparently the subject with it, and laying them both on the table.

"Glad you told me. It was quite thrilling," remarked Joe; and then fell into a fit of abstraction.

Never once had he thought, before this, of doubting Ben's guilt; but it was all clear enough now. Ben was not only innocent, but profoundly ignorant that the story had ever travelled outside of Drogheda.

The "*Drogheda Pioneer*" was a local paper of small circulation. How had Joe Fiske happened to spy a copy of it at the precise date of that unfortunate affair? Joe was always spying "items;" he was especially constituted for it. It was one of the gifts that

marked him off for editorship. Here a little and there a little, not usually the whole of a thing, not the rights of a thing or the depths of a thing, but some salient point of it he was apt to seize upon and "work up." He had seen about half a dozen copies of the "Pioneer," — the paper had died out long ago, — and one of these copies, the fatal one, he had sent forthwith to Narransauc. And why not? Joe had not "the art of letting people alone." Ben Kirke was his rival; and, if his rival had committed iniquity, it should be proclaimed from the house-tops. If Evelyn Searle cared for the man, she should be rescued. Not that he had any positive knowledge that she did: only a dark and haunting suspicion of it, which caused him to mail the paper in furious haste. He had Ben Kirke under his heel for once; and, in spite of old friendship, it *was* a satisfaction to crush him, knowing of course that he deserved to be crushed.

Joe had intended to return to Narransauc some time, and let Miss Searle know of his chivalrous defence of her. What a triumph it would be! How sweetly she would welcome him as her protector, her tutelary saint, her guardian angel! But somehow he had never pressed his advantage, he hardly knew why. He was not a sensitive person; but he could not forget his own foolish behavior that dreadful summer, and the difference it had made in her manner toward him. So it happened that as yet he had not found the courage to go back to Narransauc, or even to address Miss Searle by letter.

Moreover, though he still considered his love for her the grand passion of his life, it must be admitted that

he had since had half a dozen similar affairs, more or less thrilling, and had hardly thought of Miss Searle for months until to-day. But this breath from the past had blown aside the ashes and stirred to life a few buried coals of the old feeling; and now he was prepared to make oath that he had loved her without ceasing, and her only, and should continue to love her while the lamp of life held out to burn.

Under these circumstances it was pretty hard for him, he thought, to find out that he had made an egregious mistake, and sent her a piece of false information. The rôle of guardian angel, on which he had plumed himself, turned out to be a ridiculous farce; and he fairly tingled to his fingers' ends at the thought of it.

The two young men left the saloon, and walked together toward Broadway.

"Fine weather we're having now," chirped Mr. Fiske gayly. "Going into the country this summer, Ben?"

"No; I must rush back to Drogheda."

"Ever hear any thing these days from Narransauc?" pursued Joe cautiously.

"No; do you?"

The tone was quiet, and one might fancy rather constrained.

"Not I," said Joe, affecting a jocose manner. "Why, you wouldn't expect me to hear, after the impression I made up there three years ago! Whew, wasn't I a young scatterbrains! But those were fine girls on Violet Hill; I've never seen their equals, Ben."

"Fine girls," echoed Dr. Kirke, breaking step with his companion, and walking on with long strides.

Joe hurried after him. He was not destitute of a conscience; and, though devoted to his own interests, he did know he had wronged his friend, and he did regret it. Ben had suffered; there was no question about that. He was too proud to make a sign; but the square set of his lips, and the firm clinching of his hands, showed that Joe had just touched a live nerve, and that further allusion to Violet Hill would be intolerable.

"What shall I do?" thought Joe, positively distressed.

He would have liked to make reparation; but how? Should he tell the whole truth? What, and implicate himself, call down a shower of maledictions on his own head?

Ben would never have informed against *him*; he would have scorned to play the part of a spy and a gossip. Joe felt guilty, and wanted to be forgiven; but confess he could not, and would not. It was more than human nature could endure.

"Let bygones be bygones. Besides, an explanation might bring Ben and Evelyn together again; and I would rather see him lying dead at my feet," thought the tragic swain, who was now suffering the pangs of an ill-used, faithful, breaking heart.

"Well, Kirke," with great cordiality, "I was in luck to-day meeting you. It has set me up for a week. Walk along to my rooms, won't you?"

"Thank you, no. I am to meet a man at Chambers Street at two," looking at his watch.

"But sha'n't I see you again, Ben?"

"I'm afraid not. I leave to-morrow morning."

"Too bad! We haven't told half. But any way, Ben, I'll be on hand at the station to-morrow morning."

"All right. I'll give you a quarter of an hour there. But in case we shouldn't meet," said Dr. Kirke, taking both Mr. Fiske's hands, and wringing them, while he looked down on him with a face that fairly radiated good-will, "if we shouldn't meet, remember, Joe, I always felt, and always shall feel, the warmest interest in you, — as Art's brother."

The last three words were spoken involuntarily, for truth's sake. His interest in Joe was a sort of post-humous friendship for Arthur, and he had never pretended otherwise. He found him a very disappointing young fellow, in himself considered, but never forgot that he had survived one of the best of brothers.

"Thank you, Ben," said Joe, gyrating lightly on his left heel, but not raising his eyes. "Good-by. See you to-morrow."

Whether that last warm speech of Ben's served to thaw the crust of ice around his worldly heart, or what other influences were at work upon Joe, I cannot pretend to say; I will only state that the next morning, after Mr. Kirke had waited the promised quarter-hour at the station, and was about walking in through the opened gate, to take his seat in a car for Buffalo, the tardy youth rushed up breathless, thrust a paper into his hand, with a "Good-by, old boy, take that; and be sure you send me an answer," and was off like a rocket.

Mr. Kirke opened the paper before entering the car, and read: —

"Don't disown me, Ben; but the truth is, I knew something about that forged note before you told the story yesterday. I saw the 'Drogheda Pioneer' at the time of it, and sent it to Narransauc from a stern sense of duty. You may imagine how relieved I was yesterday to find you innocent, but it cuts me up tremendously to think I have spread the story. I hereby own up. Will you forgive me?"

JOE."

"The meddlesome monkey!"

I am obliged to quote these as the first words that rose to Dr. Kirke's lips. They seemed very personal to the old lady who was just then brushing his elbow with her bird-cage, and she turned upon him an indignant, reproachful look; but he saw neither the look nor the lady.

"So they have heard *that* at Narransauc." He dimly remembered that there had been a "Drogheda Pioneer," but it seemed incredible that so feeble a sheet could have travelled so far. That abominable slander! Why, not one of his friends outside of California had ever heard of it till he told it himself! It was such an old story now, that he had almost forgotten it. It was the merest chance, his rehearsing it yesterday to Joe; and Joe — The fire within him broke out into sparks as he glared at the note in his hand. In all the pain he had suffered from Evelyn's cold withdrawal, — and a man could hardly have felt it more, — he had never suspected *this* cause. She had said he should have his answer in a year; and he had had it a fortnight sooner than that, — the brief, irrevocable sentence, "Please consider that all is over between us." Nothing in their correspondence had led up to it, or given him cause to expect the cruel blow. On the contrary,

she had been writing him all along in a very frank, delightful vein ; and he had begun to count the days till they should meet as more than friends. When he begged an explanation, his letter came back unopened. It was very strange, and very hard to bear. He was conscious of no offence toward her, except that of loving her too well ; and, if she must dismiss him, he thought he had reason to expect her to do it in a very different way from this.

Was there something objectionable in the last letter he had written ? If so, what was it ? Her behavior was a deep mystery ; but he had finally settled down to the surmise that a certain playful speech in his last letter *must* have displeased her. It was an absurd solution, but the best he could frame ; and though he would hardly admit that she was capricious, the woman he had "honored this side of idolatry," the resentment he could not but feel toward her had helped him not a little in rallying from his disappointment.

But here was the key to the dark puzzle ; here was a vindication of her conduct. Who could blame Evelyn Searle, or any other self-respecting woman, for discarding a man she believed to be a villain ? He wondered at her sweet charity in sending him even that one little sentence in her own hand, when blank silence would have been more than he deserved. Dear Evelyn ! And was it possible that she had suffered, too ?

In the rush of these entirely new thoughts, he forgot his anger, forgot Joe, forgot every thing but the joy of his grand discovery. It was a "royal hour, the top of life." He understood every thing now, and what a dunce he had been not to understand it before ! That

poor little newspaper ! Some boy must have sent it up for a kite : otherwise it never could have gone out of the State. When could he see Evelyn ? Where was she ? He did not know ; but he would know, and that right soon.

The train was moving. Very well, he was not going to California. He turned aside to the telegraph-office, and despatched to his mother at Drogheda : —

“ I go East ; will write to-morrow.”

XXII.

"Paradise is under the shadow of swords."

MAHOMET.

"LET'S hear no shouts before victory,' the battle is yet to win," thought Dr. Kirke, alighting at Narransauc with head proudly erect, but a humiliating consciousness that he was coming back a disgraced man. He did not know where to seek Miss Searle, or whether she would consent to see him. But one thing was sadly certain, — he could expect nothing more than coldest courtesy from her or any other citizen, till he should produce his credentials. He had "endured hardness like a good soldier," but the thought of appearing among his former friends as a suspected criminal was well nigh intolerable. He had little forbearance toward Joe Fiske when he thought of the mischievous part he had played in his life. But then, it had never been expected of Joe that he would really confine himself to his own affairs.

Well, here they all were, the station agent and other officials. They could not pretend not to know Mr. Kirke.

"Why, where did you hail from? Going to stop long?" they inquired. But not one said, "I'm glad to see you back," — not even Tom of the Druid, adoring Tom; and Dr. Kirke felt the omission keenly, as he

contrasted it with the sincere regrets and good wishes on his departure three years ago.

He went to the Druid ; but Mrs. Simpson feigned not to see his outstretched hand, as he followed her into the back parlor, where her husband was asleep upon the sofa, with cheeks distending and collapsing like the sails of a ship in a breeze.

"Mrs. Simpson, my good friend," said the young man, stepping forward and confronting her, "do not turn away from me. The charges you have heard against me are false."

The worthy woman raised her dim old eyes, and looked him through and through with a kindly but searching gaze.

"Mr. Kirke, you was always a great favorite of mine. I want to believe you," she said, her lilac-colored cap-strings vibrating, as well as her broken voice.

He had thought he should scorn to do it, but it was with real satisfaction that he now drew from his breast-pocket a document duly signed and stamped with red seals. Though he had abandoned the law, he did not despise its forms ; and he had despatched to friends in Drogheda for this paper attesting his innocence, and had waited in New York until its arrival.

Mrs. Simpson received it with trembling hands, put on her spectacles, and read it through slowly, her face softening and lighting all the while ; though she waited to spell out every name, and to turn the paper over and look on the blank side, before the case seemed to her finally settled. Then with the joyful exclamation, "Bless the Lord !" loud enough to waken Mr. Simp-

son, she gave both her honest hands to the young man ; and when he stooped over her, which of the two was guilty of the tear which wet her cheek it would be impossible to say : for after it she certainly wiped her spectacles ; and he just as certainly, though rather more slyly, wiped his eyes.

It was some seconds before Mr. Simpson could be made to take in the situation ; but, when he did, there followed a scene which reminded Ben of the father's joy over the return of the prodigal son, — a scene he had not anticipated and was not prepared for. He objected seriously to "breaking down and making a fool of himself," but the sacred jubilee of this warm-hearted old couple did touch a very tender chord. And when Tom was sent for and came in, full of bcisterous delight, Dr. Kirke was ashamed that he could not meet him with dry eyes and a steady voice.

The parade of dainties on the tea-table that evening was simply bewildering, and the supper turned out an impromptu festival ; for in some mysterious way the news had aroused the whole village, and the neighbors came dropping in one after another, to offer congratulations, and drink a cup of kindness with the hero of the hour.

"Takes the shine all off our golden wedding," said the smiling Mr. Simpson, polishing his pink crown.

"What do golden weddings amount to, or you either, Simpson? *You* never did any thing you **was** ashamed of," returned Mr. Crabtree ; adding with a resounding laugh, as he shook Ben's hand for the seventeenth time, "We can't rejoice so much over good folks as we do over sinners, and there's no use talking about it."

Dr. Kirke had already made inquiries concerning "the young ladies," and learned to his regret that Miss Searle was at Dillon's Island with her uncle, and Miss Wilder had not been well enough as yet to join her.

"Date looks rather slender," Mrs. Crabtree had said; and her husband had amended it, "Yes, amazing slim."

Mrs. Simpson thought "Theodate undertook too much trying to have the liter'y club meet there while Evelyn was gone. Right in the midst of it, Wednesday, she went off in a dead faint or worse, and didn't come to for twenty minutes."

"I've heard lately," said Mrs. Putnam, "that there's heart trouble in her family, and most of her folks have gone that way."

"You'd better go up and see her, Mr. Kirke," advised Mrs. Simpson later on, when the guests had nearly all dispersed.

"Yes, do. It will kind of cheer her up," said Mr. Crabtree; adding, as the young man promptly disappeared, "There's no change in him, except for the better. He's filled out some, and seems more kind of dignified."

Miss Wilder had not heard of Dr. Kirke's arrival. She was on the lounge in the back parlor when he walked up to the open front door and rang the bell. A vacant rocking-chair on the piazza was rocking slowly in a breeze, as if it held a spiritual guest. A handful of withered golden-rod lay on the door-sill, left there by the very "Mamie" who, as a baby, had coveted his watch on his first journey to Narransauc.

It was the same quiet, beautiful place, guarded by the same everlasting hills. It was the same bright-eyed Rosa who came to the door with a cold welcome.

But it was *not* the same Miss Wilder. This he said to himself with sorrowful surprise when she entered the parlor, after receiving his card and the document.

Her greeting was cordial, even penitential; but how wasted she looked, how colorless! Usually so self-poised, she was unable now, from sheer physical weakness, to control her agitation. She said over and over, with her hand pressed against her side, "So it was all a mistake. Oh, I am so glad, so glad!" But she drew her breath with difficulty; and Rosa, who seemed to have been waiting in the hall for that very purpose, came in presently with a glass of water and a pair of pillows, and urged her to recline upon the sofa.

Dr. Kirke was much perturbed, and blamed himself for having intruded upon her too abruptly. He might have sent a note in advance to prepare her for his calling to-morrow, if he had really been aware that she was so seriously indisposed. He waited only till she was calmer, and, after a few remarks on indifferent subjects, hastened to take his leave. But this she would not permit.

"I was strangely out of tune a few days ago, and am hardly recovered yet," said she, trying to rise, but sinking back to her half-recumbent position. "And your coming was a surprise. There, I'm better now. Pray stay and talk to me."

"May I monopolize the conversation, Miss Wilder?"

"Oh, yes, it is just what I want! Sit down again, Mr. Kirke. Tell me how it all happened. Ah, but

you need not have sent me this paper! A word from your lips would have sufficed."

"Thank you for that," said he gratefully. And then he began at the beginning, and told the simple story in a few words.

"Rather humiliating, Miss Wilder, that I should have to come back to Narransauc bringing a certificate of good moral character."

"Like a coachman? yes."

"I never knew till last week that this miserable slander had reached you. But, when I heard of it, I resolved to come and contradict it. My friends here, at least two of them, are too precious to lose."

"Oh, I am so glad you came! We shall both be so glad." Theodate was no longer pale; and Dr. Kirke looked disapprovingly, and with some anxiety, at the deep flush which had centred in each cheek.

"It was very kind of you to come. You cannot think how hard this has been for us, Mr. Kirke — no, *Dr. Kirke*." She smiled up at him as she spoke, and he smiled in reply. They were both thinking how much had happened since they parted. "We could not bear to believe it of you. I wish we had trusted to our instincts, which told us better than to believe it. In fact, Dr. Kirke, I did go so far as to write to the post-master at Drogheda, hoping he would tell me that it was a mistake."

"Bless you, Miss Wilder, my true friend!"

"But he only confirmed the report; and then what chance was left for doubt?"

"None — to you."

"And you can't blame us?"

"For what? For casting me off? How could you have done otherwise? Still, Miss Wilder, if I had only had a hint, some little word!" He sprang impulsively to his feet, stung by the recollection of the needless anguish he had suffered.

"It was cruel," said Theodate. "But how could Evelyn — how could either of us, suspect you needed a hint? Criminals generally know but too well their own guilt."

"True; very true." He reseated himself. "I keep forgetting what a villain I am," said he, laughing somewhat bitterly. "You must forgive me. It takes some time to adjust myself to the situation."

"Dr. Kirke, who sent that newspaper to Mr. Simpson? I know, without your telling me: it was Bryant Fiske."

"Did she know this by one of her shrewd intuitions?" Ben wondered; but he did not reply.

Theodate sat upright, and fanned herself with energy. Words seemed feeble at the moment.

"It was sent in good faith, Miss Wilder."

"Yes, from pure benevolence. I understand it all," she cried.

"I met Joe last week in New York," went on Dr. Kirke, "and that was the way it came out. He need not have confessed to sending the paper, but he did confess voluntarily. He is not bad at heart."

"What less could he have done, if he was human?" exclaimed Theodate, her eyes flashing. "I hope he fell on his knees and begged your pardon in face of the whole congregation."

Dr. Kirke would have enjoyed this outburst of wrath,

if he had not feared that Miss Wilder was becoming unduly excited; for she was evidently much weaker than she wished to acknowledge.

He began, as soon as possible, to talk of other matters, — of the fine climate of Drogheda, its luscious fruits, its dreary lack of grass. By degrees he arrived again at Narransauc and Violet Hill, and ventured an inquiry as to Miss Searle. She was still at the islands, Miss Wilder said. Her uncle had come home three days ago, and left her there.

“She does not know your state of health, perhaps?”

“She does not know I am worse, or she would be here on the wings of the wind. I was not well when she left home, and that was why I sent her away.”

Dr. Kirke looked his surprise.

“She was always anxious, always watching me. I could see it tired her.”

“But she ought to know the truth, Miss Wilder.”

“What is the truth?” asked Theodate with a look he could not quite fathom. “Do you think me so very ill?”

He evaded a direct reply. How much did she understand of her true condition, — this unselfish woman, who had deliberately chosen to suffer alone?

“You have a physician?”

“Yes, — Dr. Cargill of Latium; *not* Dr. Stone,” she replied with something of her old force of manner.

Dr. Kirke smiled faintly. He remembered that old prejudice, and he remembered also that he had thought Dr. Cargill a man of more pretension and less brains than Dr. Stone.

“When you come next time, Dr. Kirke, I’d like to

talk with you, and see if you and Dr. Cargill agree about my case."

"Very well," he said, restraining his professional impulse to take her wrist, and question its still small voice. "When I come again, we will have a long talk; but now I really ought to go. And may I ask you Miss Searle's exact address?" he said with some embarrassment.

"Just the Dillon House. So you are going down there? That is right."

"Do you think she would refuse to see me?"

"Oh, no, no fear of that!" said Miss Wilder promptly, but added in a qualifying tone, "that is, if you send her a note of explanation. I did not need it, but she may. She is more prudent than I, more consistent."

"So I fear," thought Dr. Kirke. "And what message shall I bear from you?"

"None; except my dearest love."

"But, Miss Wilder" —

"Please don't remonstrate with me, Dr. Kirke. I am sure you think me worse than I am; and it is quite natural, seeing me for the first time after such a long interval. For I know I *have* changed. But I am not likely to die to-day or to-morrow," looking up brightly. "So don't ask me to call Evelyn home."

"Still, if she wishes to come?"

"Then forbid it, from me. Tell her I charge her to stay through August."

Dr. Kirke had risen to go, but lingered, looking down in pity and wonder at the resolute figure upon the sofa. "You mystify me, Miss Wilder. We

generally want our best friends about us when we are ill."

"Not if it is going to terrify them," she returned with a faint, yearning smile. "For several days, I have been simply dreadful to behold. But I'm gaining now, and I take such care of myself! Why, I've felt wonderfully better all day; and in another week I may be quite bright, almost myself, you know. At any rate, she *must* wait a week. It is for her own sake, Dr. Kirke."

He did not answer. "Good-by, Miss Wilder. You will let me come again?"

"Oh, do, pray do! I never was so happy in my life. And to think of what this will be to Evelyn!" She checked herself, afraid lest she might reveal too much of what she knew, or fancied, of her friend's feelings. "Evelyn is always so glad to know that people are better than they are represented, the dear girl! There is joy in heaven, you know."

After he was gone, she reclined in perfect quiet for a full half-hour.

"Yes, joy, pure joy. This is more than I prayed for," she murmured, folding her hands, with a smile like moonlight on still waters. "All is well with her, and she will not need me any more. Father, I am ready. I can bear to leave her now. Forgive me, that, while I trusted thee for myself, I never fully trusted thee for her."

Dr. Kirke passed out with a grave, thoughtful face.

Rosa was still lingering in the hall. He gave her a meaning look; and she slipped out at the back door, and met him half-way down the hill, out of sight of

the house. She went eagerly, for her old faith in the man had been quite re-established by the conversation she had just overheard between him and Miss Date.

"Tell me all about it, Rosa. How long has she been so ill?"

"Oh, sir," replied Rosa, in a frightened tone, "it has been going on for weeks and weeks! I knew of lots of spells she had up in her room; but she wouldn't let me tell Miss Evelyn, for Miss Evelyn never would have went off, if she had known it. And Miss Evelyn went; and Miss Date has fell away steady ever since, and grows worse right straight along. Peter and me, we feel scared."

"Well, go on."

"And she wouldn't hear to my writing to Miss Evelyn, and wouldn't write herself. And Peter, he goes one day to old Dr. Stone, and asks him to call; and Miss Date didn't like it much, and wouldn't tell him what ailed her. He thought it was her liver, and some of those things. And how Miss Date laughed about it after he was gone! Then she had Dr. Cargill; and he laughed, too, and said, 'We won't hunt for butterflies while there's bears in the woods.' I don't know what that meant, but it made Miss Date look pretty sober."

"What else did he say?"

"Well, he said she hadn't any lungs and livers and things: 'twas her heart. And Peter says the heart is the main art'ry," almost in a whisper.

"Ah!"

"Yes; and that's why she has to sit kind of propped

up, so as to keep the main art'ry straight, or it will stop the breath. That's what Peter says."

These lessons in physiology were heard with flattering attention.

"Does she think Dr. Cargill helps her?"

"I don't know. But *we* think the new drops is making her worse: that's what we think, Peter and me; and we wish Miss Evelyn was here. But Miss Date won't let her come; though it's Miss Evelyn's own house, and she begs and begs to come. Oh, how I wish she could! Every thing's always so beautiful when Miss Evelyn is here, and she can manage Miss Date splendid," said Rosa, in a confidential tone.

"Rosa, I'm going to Latium to take the night train for Portland. I think, as you do, that Miss Evelyn ought to be here; and, if possible, I will bring her home to-morrow."

"O Mr. Kirke, to-morrow? Will Miss Date be willing?"

"I have not asked her, but you may tell her what I say. And tell her Miss Evelyn will certainly think it very cruel, if she is kept away any longer."

"Oh, I will, Mr. Kirke; and, if you fetch her home, I'll bless you to the longest day I live!"

XXIII.

"God standing in the shadows, taking care of his own."

MISS SEARLE was standing on the island wharf with several other people from the hotel, watching the stately approach of the nine o'clock boat, which was faintly outlined through a veil of mist. Evelyn wore her yachting-suit of silver gray, with ribbons and garniture of soft, bright blue; and as the damp wind lifted her tresses of crisped gold, and freshened the faint wild-rose tint in her cheek, she looked — this was admitted privately by young Miss Parmenter to young Miss Chase — "not a day older than we do, Carrie; though she must be quite an old maid, don't you know?"

Little dreamed these girls of seventeen, secure in their youthful charms, that Miss Searle was of a far higher type of beauty than either of themselves, and to thinking people vastly more attractive. If she had ever suffered, the healing years had touched the wound. If she had been in danger of "growing dim," the sea air, new companionship, and fresh thoughts had fully "restored" her.

But for all her bright looks and unwonted gayety, which with a little effort would have made her prime favorite in the little circle here, Evelyn had not been at

all content at the island, and would have gone home gladly with her uncle. She not only longed constantly for Theodate, but felt a growing anxiety about her, and had firmly resolved never under any circumstances to leave her again.

It might be absurd, but she hardly felt at liberty to return to her own house when Theodate wrote so insistently, "I shall be wretched if you come." Why should Theodate choose to stay alone when she was ill? "Her loneliness foldeth a wonderful loving," thought Evelyn reverently. "I know she chooses it for my sake; yet I sometimes fancy there is a deeper reason still,—that she is afraid to lean too much on human love. 'By so much the more does a man draw nigh to God, as he goes away from all earthly solace,' I heard her say once, with a rapt look that touched me to the heart; and I grew numb with a sudden fear. What should I do without *her*, — I, poor I? That dreadful pallor she has sometimes is from mere fatigue, I dare say; but when I am away from her I am haunted by it. — Dear me, what is Mr. Gourlay talking about?"

Mr. Gourlay, a Canadian gentleman who was botanizing at the island, was standing beside her, looking out upon the water. "You expect a friend, Miss Searle?"

"Oh, no!" a cloud floating over the summer sky of her face, as she asked herself, Who was there now to come? for the circle of her closest friends had narrowed very much within the past few years; and then involuntarily the thought arose, that once she might have been looking out for Mr. Kirke, whereas now she

would never look for him again, or ever care to see his face.

“No; I am only expecting letters,” she said. “One always expects letters here, you know.”

The mist was creeping in from the sea, like unhappy, haunting thoughts; but the boat had swung clear of it by this time, and was well defined, and drawing very near the wharf.

Mr. Gourlay remembered that Miss Searle had a sick friend from whom she was anxious to hear, and this might account for her abstracted air, as the boat stopped and the passengers began to land. She was looking, probably, for that magical leathern purse of Fortunatus, the mail-bag, which some one was flinging into a wheelbarrow over a pile of newly arrived groceries. But her interest in the mail-bag could hardly have caused her to turn her head away from it; nor was it to be expected that a young lady of her good manners should whirl completely around while a gentleman was speaking to her, ignoring his remarks altogether.

Mr. Gourlay would have understood it better if he had observed the tall young man who was coming toward them, never once moving his eyes from the figure in the silver-gray yachting-suit. Dr. Kirke had recognized Evelyn from a long distance; and, as he stepped out upon the landing, he saw at once that she knew him, and wished to avoid a meeting. He could not blame her, and under any other circumstances would have passed on to the hotel and left her in peace. But now this would not do. She had it in her power to escape from him by going off in a yacht, or

fleeing to her room, or doing any one of fifty other things; and there was no time to lose. So, at the risk of downright impertinence, he walked boldly up to her, and said in courteous tones, but loud enough to be heard by all, "Ah, Miss Searle, is it you? I have an important message for you. Will you oblige me by walking with me to the hotel?"

He knew her well enough to be sure she would not make a scene. She only hesitated for an imperceptible second, and then said, "Thank you, Mr. Kirke. I hope the message is not from Miss Wilder?" and went on with him up the rising ground, quite as if he were an old acquaintance from whom she had parted only yesterday.

A bringer of bad news, Mr. Gourlay feared. But the news, whatever it was, could wait; it must wait, at least, till this terrible barrier between them was laid low.

"Miss Wilder sent no message but her love. She declares she is better," said he, willing to temporize a little.

"Oh, I am very, very glad!"

"Miss Searle," he added, dropping his voice to a low key, tremulous with feeling, "for Heaven's sake, listen to me! As the Lord lives, I am an innocent man."

Till then she had not looked at him; but she turned quickly now, and cried, "O Mr. Kirke!" with a little, half-strangled sob.

"It was only a case of mistaken identity," he continued eagerly. "The crime was committed by a man who looked like me; but it all happened so long ago

that I had nearly forgotten it, when I met some one last week in New York. — I have papers in proof of my innocence, Miss Searle, which I will show you when we reach the hotel."

"Never mind that," said she brokenly.

His word was enough for her, — his word and that manly, earnest face. What cared she for proofs? Theodate had quite overrated her "prudence and consistency," it seemed.

She would have given him her hand, only in their agitation they had walked on in advance of the others, and she was shy of observation. But she let him read her eyes, which always showed the least pleasure so quickly, and were radiant now with the intensest joy she had ever known.

"Can you ever forgive me?" She tried to speak steadily, but her lips quivered and her voice died away.

It was a moment of pure delight to Dr. Kirke. He had staked all upon this meeting, yet had counted on some delay from cautious doubts. Miss Searle was unworldly, he knew, but not impulsive; he had scarcely hoped for such a ready assent to his bare word of honor.

"It is no question of forgiveness," said he gratefully.

She led him to the grape arbor, fortunately vacant, where she knew they would be secure from intrusion. There was nothing for her now in heaven or earth but the knowledge that the man she had wronged was worthy her esteem; of her love she did not even think. Whatever of a personal nature had passed between

them was over long ago. It was the vast injustice she had done him, the reparation she would make, that filled her thoughts. It was happiness enough to know she need no longer shut him out of her heart, as a warden turns a key relentlessly upon a felon.

It was a rustic arbor, and the grapes upon it would be small and sour, if they ever ripened; but on entering Dr. Kirke removed his hat as if it were the Holy Gate of Moscow. How long it seemed since he had been granted the high favor of a *tête-à-tête* with Evelyn! And never had he seen her like this before. He held out both hands to her appealingly.

"You do believe me? You take me back, at least to the old favor?"

"Yes, oh, yes! How cruel I have been!"

"To the old favor, Evelyn; but may it not be something more?" he asked huskily.

He was deathly pale, but his firm lips and resolute eyes indicated a reserve of mental strength. "You know by this time, or you surely ought to know, what to say to me. I will receive your answer now, and abide by it forever."

"O Mr. Kirke, I did not suppose you would care, after all this."

Not that she meant to trifle with him; but he had taken her at unawares, and it was her nature to be timid and reserved. She had not thought of him in this light for a long while, and she had not her answer ready.

"It is not that you doubt my innocence?"

"No; oh, no! oh, no!" taking one of his hands warmly in both her own.

The cold dignity which had suddenly appeared in his manner melted at this. He bent toward her with an indescribably tender motion. "Evelyn, is there any thing I can say to you now, that I have not already said by speech or written word, to prove my love?"

"No; oh, no! It is not that," said she hesitatingly.

"Then may I ask what stands between us?" He spoke with bated breath. For all his apparent calmness, she knew the hour had struck when they must be all or nothing to each other. If she had ever tried him by her indecision, — and she saw now that this might be so, — it was clear that he would brook no more trifling.

The party from the wharf were strolling past the arbor, and their gay voices floated over from the road on the left. Evelyn and Dr. Kirke were still standing; but while he looked intently at her, she looked in perplexity at the landscape.

"Wait a little, Mr. Kirke. I cannot be hurried. It is once for all; and remember I have to think of Theodate."

"Why of her?" he asked earnestly. "That large-souled, gracious, exalted woman is sufficient to herself." Could this be all, he wondered, — the sole cause of her hesitation?

"Nevertheless, she would not leave Maine; and how could I leave *her*?" said Evelyn, looking up half afraid. What beautiful eyes he had, and how they drew her! Was it her duty to resist the attraction?

He advanced a step nearer, and she would have retreated, in loyalty to Theodate; but something held her,

like a scrap of iron held by a magnet. Was it because she had wronged him, and her conscience would not let her off till she had paid the uttermost farthing? Or was there no choice left her? Was the will of the magnet her law?

"O Mr. Kirke," said she, in a soft, entreating voice, though her pulses were throbbing to their utmost, "don't you see I am ground between the upper and nether millstones?"

"What millstones?" he cried exultantly, — "myself and Theodate? Tell me, is that all?"

"I believe so."

"Evelyn, she would not ask you to think of her. She is like one of God's angels."

His manner, rather than his words, startled Evelyn.

"Oh, what do you mean? You have told me nothing yet. You do not think her very ill?"

"I cannot say till I have seen her again. She bade me tell you she is better. Still, Dr. Cargill" —

"I never knew she had called Dr. Cargill. O my Theodate!" said Evelyn with a pathetic little cry; and, as he extended his arms, she sank into them, scarcely knowing what she did, and let them fold her round, as a grieved child accepts the haven of a mother's breast. She was thinking at the moment only of Theodate, who must be worse, and of the pain it was to be shut away from her by Theodate's own decree. It did not occur to her that by this involuntary act she was mutely answering Dr. Kirke's question and appeal. In another second she remembered, but it was then too late. He said nothing to remind her that it

was the supreme moment of his life. He knew she had come to him "once for all," but he spoke only of Theodate.

"She may not be so ill as she seems. She does not want you to go to her, Evelyn; still, I think she needs you."

"I am going now, at once, in the next boat. I cannot help it if she objects. O Mr. Kirke," with a long-drawn, tremulous sob, "you know better than any one else how hard it has been to stay here and wait for letters, and feel that she might be worse and would not let me know."

"She expects you back with me," said he. Still, he gently detained her.

"Expects me? Is it possible? You prevailed upon her, then? How good of you!"

And with an exquisite little caressing touch of her head against his shoulder, she broke from him and fled away toward the house, to make ready for the journey, leaving him gazing after her as her graceful, retreating figure grew shadowy in the shrouding mist.

But there was no obscurity for him now, or haunting doubts: his life spread out before him like the varied landscape of the island, — a plan of God, most beautiful and clear. The sea was creeping in wherever it could find an inlet; the road winding to the unknown was fringed with grass, which, ubiquitous, like the ocean, sought a foothold even in the highway itself. Afar off he knew the air was sweet with wild roses, juniper, and fern. Near him he saw broad meadows of mown grass, the emblem of humility, and remembered that it is sometimes a blessing to be cast down awhile when

one's estate has been too high. In this mood he could even forgive Joe Fiske. Joe had brought him low enough; but, before and beyond all that, had he not been the unconscious means of leading him to Evelyn? "Perhaps I wronged the boy, Art's brother; but, if I did, he has had his revenge, and we will call it even and let it pass."

So he and Evelyn went together toward Narransauc, and "love was answered and life was clear." And he tried to banish his forebodings regarding Theodate. After all, what did he really know of the case, and why should he excite Evelyn to an alarm which might be needless?

"I am so glad and thankful to be going home. Why, my heart is lightened already of half its fears," she said with a brilliant look. "I'm cowardly and unreasonable when I'm away from her; but when I once get back where I can see her every minute — Oh, how kind it was of you, Dr. Kirke!"

For him it was an enchanted journey, and Evelyn could not have been more charming if she had spent the past years in storing up lovely words and looks against his return. There was atonement in this, but there was something more. She had crossed, "once for all," the debatable land between friendship and love; and he learned to his delight how different is a woman fully won from a woman only half-persuaded.

Up to the last moment she had hesitated for Theodate's sake; but now, having made a final surrender of her heart to the man Theodate approved, it was easy to assure herself that this was no wrong to her

friend, and that now, if Theodate would only improve, all would go well.

“Listen,” whispered Theodate. “Is that the train?”

The faint rumble in the distance might have been summer thunder, but no one thought of doubting the evidence of Theodate’s quickened senses. She was very ill indeed. There had been a great change for the worse.

Dr. Cargill was standing by her bedside with his finger upon her pulse, as he had stood by Evelyn on that September night now nearly three years since. He made the slightest perceptible shake of the head when Mr. Searle looked at him inquiringly.

“I hope I shall be here — when she comes. Half an hour,” said Theodate, in a fainter whisper, as Mr. Searle bent reverently over her pillow.

A white calm was on her face, without a shade of fear or doubt. “But now — she will not — need me — any more,” she said slowly; and her lips seemed scarcely to move.

“Theodate, dear Theodate, how can we give you up?” said Mr. Searle, his eyes suffused with tears.

“I am not needed — any more,” repeated the pale lips with a restful smile. “God let me stay till” — She left the sentence, and added, “I am glad he let me stay so long.”

It was five o’clock. Outside, from the open window, could be seen the green meadows and the soft sky. From far away could be heard the “song-talk” of the birds.

"Life is wonderfully interesting," thought Theodate, closing her eyes, — was it for the last time? "Only eight notes in the gamut, yet such a variety of tunes."

She seemed sinking, but revived a little after a draught the doctor gave her. Her left hand lay in Mr. Searle's right. She raised her eyes and looked at him with a smile never while he lived to be forgotten. "Tell Evelyn I loved her to the last," she said.

The words rang out loud and clear; they seemed the final effort of a passing soul. Then gradually her eyelids drooped, and Dr. Cargill thought they would never rise again.

But God was merciful to Evelyn. It was not at that hour or on that day that her faithful friend was "caught inward toward the eternal melodies," and "entered into the mystery of glory."